

# **bordEUr**



## **Fences, Refugee Boats, and the New Border- lands**

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**Democracy  
Institute**

**bord[EU]r**  
Jean Monnet New European Borderlands Network

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



## **BordEUr: New European Borderlands**

# **Fences, Refugee Boats, and the New Borderlands: Making Sense of the European Union's Emerging Internal and External Borders**

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BordEUr is a collaborative research project of nine universities that documents and assesses the proliferation of new borders in the aftermath of the EU’s recent crises, with a special emphasis on the so-called migration crisis. The project analyzes the symbolic role of borders in ontological narratives (those of both the EU and its member states), as well as the bordering policies that these narratives enable. You can read more about the project on the project website at [www.bordeur-project.com](http://www.bordeur-project.com).

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## Table of Contents

<b>Contributors</b>	5
<b>Introduction</b>	10
<b>1. Italy and EU's Co-constitutive Bordering Effort</b> <i>Michela Ceccorulli</i>	25
<b>2. Policies and Politics of De- and Re-bordering: The Case of Austria from 1995 to 2021</b> <i>Ivan Josipovic, Sieglinde Rosenberger, Helena Segarra, and Magdalena Übleis-Lang</i>	38
<b>3. United in bordering, divided in solidarity: (re)bordering practices in and à la carte/flexible solidarity towards Greece in the post-2014 migration management</b> <i>Alexandra Prodromidou and Petros Golitsis</i>	56
<b>4. Readmission or Desecuritization? The Recent Migration Crisis and Bordering Narratives and Practices in Turkey</b> <i>Başak Alpan</i>	67
<b>5. The Border as a Symbolic Resource: Lessons from Hungary</b> <i>András Szalai</i>	84
<b>6. In the EU and Out of the Schengen Area: Bulgaria's Experience and Challenges in Securing the EU's External Border</b> <i>Plamen Ralchev</i>	102
<b>7. In-Securitization through Externalization? The EU and the Western Balkans "Borderlands"</b> <i>Stefano Bianchini, Silvia Cittadini, and Marco Zoppi</i>	120
<b>8. EU Citizens, Free Movement, and Ontological (In)Security in the UK: Beyond National Citizens and Post-National Entrepreneurs?</b> <i>Owen Parker</i>	135
<b>9. Urban resilience and ontological security: analyzing de-bordering processes in Barcelona</b> <i>Ricard Zapata-Barrero</i>	176

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## Introduction

### **Borders and Crises in the European Union**

*Andras Szalai, Owen Parker, Sonia Lucarelli, and Alexandra Prodromitid\**

The European project, built on neoliberal principles, presents a curious amalgam of a regional structure that both removes and imposes borders. On the one hand it advocates integration based on a single market, while on the other hand it tolerates and supports state-centric approaches on issues of security. It removes internal borders, facilitating the mobility and settlement of Europeans in an ever-enlarging EU space and imposes new borders that restrict the mobility of non-Europeans. A market governing logic—at the heart of the European project—drives the removal of borders, while a still-strong sovereign logic drives the (re)-imposition of borders when the Union is faced with issues that have been highly securitized. These dual logics play out both internally and externally.

Internally a market logic has driven a single market project that includes the creation of a borderless “Schengen area,” facilitating the mobility of goods, services, capital, and people across the now barely perceptible national land borders. Such a logic combines with a sovereign logic to create the category of an ‘EU citizen’ whose mobility is now accompanied by the right to settle and claim a ‘right to rights’ in a member state other than their own. At the same time, a sovereign logic has driven the EU’s involvement in the ever-intensifying policing of its external borders, including the creation of an external border agency, FRONTEX.

Externally, a market logic drives attempts to expand the space for market interactions beyond the EU itself, including the attempt to Europeanize regulatory norms and rules and attempts to open channels for the ability of small (National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015-2020), 2015) numbers of economically ‘desirable’ third country migrants to enter the EU. At the same time, a sovereign logic drives policies to still ‘protect’ certain EU markets, such as agriculture, and efforts to ensure that non-EU states prevent the mobility of economically ‘undesirable’ third country nationals towards the EU space.

The EU’s multiple crises over the past decade constitute a crisis for both logics of governing borders. Following the economic and Eurozone crisis, the success and very legitimacy of the European market-making project was brought into question. What little remained of the “permissive consensus” was eroded in many member states as economic hardship and inequality intensified. This crisis created the unpropitious circumstances in which the EU had to deal with a further crisis of governance; namely, the so-called ‘migrant crisis’ or ‘migration crisis’<sup>1</sup> (alternatively labeled the ‘refugee crisis’), which was essentially a crisis of management of large flows of migrants seeking refuge in Europe following political upheaval and economic deprivation in the Middle East, South Asia, and Northern Africa.

The migrant crisis retriggered already existing crises in the EU (the Eurozone crisis and the crisis of liberal democracy) and exposed deep divides among EU members on issues of solidarity, common

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<sup>1</sup> We are aware of the contentious nature and analytical inadequacies of the concept. Here, ‘migrant crisis’ is used as a shorthand, lifted from EU parlance, for the events of 2015–16.

policies, and the protection of human rights, in favor of both internal and external border securitization. These problems were then exacerbated by the COVID pandemic in 2020 and Russia's War on Ukraine in 2022. As a result, the EU's normative power of promoting free market policies, like freedom of movement among its members states (e.g., the Schengen agreement) and strengthening liberal democratic and humanitarian values in its periphery, were sidelined in exchange for outsourcing the management of all migrant flows. The handling of the post-2014 'migration crisis' along the Balkan route is a great example of this. The influx of irregular migrants through the region, which includes both EU member and candidate states (i.e., both internal and external EU borders), created tensions both among the corridor states (e.g. Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria/Greece and North Macedonia/North Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary and Austria etc.) and between EU members (e.g. Austria and Hungary).

In the aftermath of both crises, we saw some evidence of Monnet's famous functionalist assertion that "Europe would be built through crises." Internally, the EU sought, partially successfully, to deepen the integration of its economic governance and, less successfully, its immigration and asylum governance. However, the crises also led to a backlash against the EU as a market maker, a security actor, and a promoter of liberal ideals. Such a backlash was manifested in growing populism, nationalism, and Euroscepticism. To a far lesser extent, the backlash manifested in the promotion of progressive alternatives to the EU status quo. In many states migration was politicized—and intra-EU and extra-EU migrants were securitized in a number of national contexts. State reactions to the perceived migration crisis forced the security logic both on the internal and the external dimension: internal borders rematerialized and free movement was limited, threatening the Schengen system. Likewise, borders were also pushed further outside through externalization of border control towards the so-called 'New Borderlands' in the Western Balkans, Turkey, and North Africa. Meanwhile, the population of one of the EU's largest states, the United Kingdom, voted to leave the EU, with the pro-BREXIT narrative built largely on anti-migration sentiment. These political dynamics led to a hardening of the EU's sovereign governing logic. Internally, the rules on the free movement of people have hardened with recent ECJ case law, permitting greater levels of discrimination against non-nationals by member states. Externally, the EU extended its cooperation with external partners, including EU candidate countries. In the process of doing so, it compromised to a certain degree its traditional normative power—the 2016 EU-Turkey agreement is an example of an attempt to outsource the management of the 'crisis.' Another example is the case of various Western Balkan states, like North Macedonia and Serbia, adopting quotas in the hope of improving their chances of EU membership.

Indeed, as studies in this volume document, new borders proliferated in the aftermath of the EU's crises, which in various ways, were crises of those very borders. This introduction aims to first conceptually situate our research. Our point of departure is the concept of ontological security, the security of the Self (Giddens, 1991; Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020; Mitzen, 2006). We argue that the EU, as well as its member states, are engaged in a self-reidentification through narratives and practices to mitigate the atmosphere of uncertainty that the crises brought about. Self-identification is crucial in maintaining stability of the Self, and therefore the ability to act.

Next, we discuss the effects of the so-called migration "crisis" and suggest that it is particularly paradoxical for the EU for two reasons. First, it challenges both existing narratives that the Union relies on during crisis situations, most notably the progressive narrative about further integration as the solution to stagnation. It also challenges the EU's narrative (and broader self-representation) about its own foreign policy actorness ('normative power Europe'). Second, the extensive (re)bordering practices that have

emerged on both the European and the member state level equally challenge the stories the EU tells about itself. Narrative contradiction and a widening gap between what the EU says and what it does (narratives vs. practices) further escalate the ontological security problem and hinder adequate policy responses. Hence narratives and practices are part of the same process of self-reidentification of the EU and its borders.

As a next step, we draw attention to the crucial importance of borders in narratives and practices about Europe and migration. Borders are of course highly symbolic—they delineate the limits of the European political community and often explicitly create a threatening Other. Bordering and fortification were the EU's and member states' primary policy responses to mass migration (both internal and external) and led to three ways in which new border(land)s were created: the reemergence of physical borders within the Union (most notably the reintroduction of borders within the Schengen zone); the creation of 'New Borderlands' through externalization; and the redrawing of borders through Brexit. We understand borders both in the physical sense, but also in their soft sense, i.e., as symbolic boundaries about the limits of political communities—be it on the state or European level—that are used to naturalize hard borders. We equally highlight how, due to the EU's peculiarities, bordering does not exclusively take place at state borders, but also in new locales: airports, travel agencies, the internet, and of course, in third countries. This diverse geography of borders necessitates an interdisciplinary approach.

## **Narratives and Ontological Security in the EU**

Contributors of this volume depart from the observation that recent crises were framed as *existential* within the EU, on both the EU and member state levels. These crises challenged the EU's progressive narrative, which refers to the EU's ability to move towards further integration in case a crisis upsets its stability and created ontological insecurity in the Union. The concept of ontological security (the security of the Self) shows how actors safeguard the persistence of a sense of Self under recurring uncertainty. It suggests that all actors instinctively seek "biographical continuity" in order to ensure stability of Self's existence, and also their ability to act (Johansson-Nogués, 2018, p. 529). Ontological security then investigates how actors (individuals, states, societies etc.) create habits, routines, and intersubjective relations to ensure such continuity. Narratives are central to the concept because they serve as the key means by which actors link the issues of the present to those of the past and tell stories about possible common futures. Simply put, narratives are the stories that we tell ourselves and others about who we are, where we come from, and what our goals and aspirations are.

Narrative construction is mostly elite-driven and strategic (Cianciara, 2017; Miskimmon et al., 2013; Nițoiu, 2013; Schumacher, 2015). It does not just underpin an actor's understanding of the social world, but is also used to reinforce legitimacy and status (Schrag Sternberg, 2013). Policy elites and institutions use narratives to justify the construction, adoption, and implementation of policies by creating emotional, ideational, or material linkages with them (Cianciara, 2017, 2021). The success of narratives depends not only on the strength of these linkages, but also on whether the narratives resonate with the social imaginaries of as wide a public as possible (Nițoiu, 2013, p. 241). In sum, narratives can be and are used to provide a continuity of the Self for ontological security, and also to attain legitimacy for policies.

In order to counter the problem of ontological insecurity resulting from the above series of crises, the EU, just like any other actor (including EU member states) also resorts to narrative construction. In

fact, EU elites have been calling for a “new narrative” for Europe since 2014 that would “articulate what Europe stands for today and tomorrow” (European Commission, 2015). Moreover, recent crises have prompted much reflection on what the future of the EU will and should look like, with the von der Leyen Commission’s proposal for a Conference on the Future of Europe only the most recent such endeavor (see also *Conference on the Future of Europe*, n.d.; European Commission, 2020). Such soul-searching is of course nothing new, as the centrality of narratives to European politics has been widely researched, from integration to foreign policy (Hill et al., 2017; Manners, 2010; Manners & Murray, 2016).<sup>2</sup> In fact, the EU has a multitude of often clashing narratives it can draw upon in such situations, developed over its years of existence. These narratives serve as cognitive and normative maps that provide certainty in whose name the EU acts and why, thereby giving it constancy and agency, even without the presence of a clear European identity (Della Sala, 2018, p. 267). Frequently used EU narratives include the Union’s “foundational narrative” about it being a peace project, the related “EU as a promoter of peace” narrative, the “democratization narrative,” the “progressive narrative” about integration, the “convergence narrative” about economic integration, the “security narrative” that prioritizes the security of EU citizens, and many more. Of course, there is no single accepted taxonomy for these narratives, and their identification and classification is to a considerable degree a matter of research design. The above selection is therefore not meant to be an exhaustive list.

When we talk about narratives, we make a crucial distinction between reflexive and relational narratives. Reflexive narratives are aimed at the political community, and are concerned with how the Self is constructed, and how this construction can make sense of the social world. Relational narratives on the other hand secure routine relationships with external actors to affirm Self-identities. These narratives emphasize differences, and can even outright mark out an Other (Mitzen, 2006; Nițoiu, 2013). While reflexive narratives are crucial for creating ontological security within the political community of the member state, as well as that of the European Union as a whole, relational narratives are pivotal in enabling the EU’s foreign policy actorness by framing its relationships with partners, for instance in its ‘New Borderlands.’ However, the two categories are not necessarily analytically separate. First, European elites and institutions have been shown to routinely utilize foreign policy narratives for increasing legitimacy in the case of internal deadlocks (Bickerton, 2011; Nițoiu, 2013). Second, reflexive narratives are inextricably tied to external narratives as the EU regularly universalizes its own values in its foreign policy (Manners, 2002). A mismatch between internal and external narratives or practices therefore leads to a loss of legitimacy vis-à-vis third countries.

The EU has relied on two major narratives in its response to the migration challenge: a security narrative about safeguarding borders, and a humanitarian narrative about the EU’s duty to save the lives of migrants (Ceccorulli & Lucarelli, 2018; Schumacher, 2015). The security narrative explains how the EU and its citizens are subject to threats that are border-transcending and multidimensional. These threats require the EU develop and employ comprehensive capabilities and policies (Schumacher, 2015, p. 385). This narrative divides the world into spaces of security and insecurity, with the EU acting as a key space of security and stability (cf. the EU peace project narrative) (Manners & Murray, 2016). The narrative is then used to justify further integration as a source of stability (cf. progressive narrative), but also the use of measures that keep threats outside. It is perhaps easy to see how this narrative mirrors state narratives.

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<sup>2</sup> The EU has attempted to variously construct Europeans as post-national ‘citizens’ and market actors or ‘entrepreneurs’ (Parker, 2012). The EU also has also made legitimation attempts at key junctures in the face of public opposition and/or skepticism (Schrag Sternberg, 2013).

The humanitarian narrative on the other hand is about the EU's duties as a global humanitarian actor (See Nițoiu, 2013). It tells of a Union that is obliged to address security challenges at their roots by extending EU governance and by transferring EU norms and values.

The migration crisis challenges both narratives and highlights the tensions between them. Policy-wise, the EU relies mainly on fortification (fencing and heightened security measures) and buffering (creating borderlands as buffer zones). These bordering measures were special in that they combined two contradictory processes: border confirming and "border transcending" (Dimitrova quoted in Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2017, p. 72). On the one hand, the EU fenced off existing external and internal borders. On the other hand, it created new kinds of interdependent relationships with partner countries (especially with Turkey) through border control externalization, the promotion of relocation mechanisms, and other cooperative actions. This is not to say that such policy measures are new for the EU (See e.g. Léonard, 2011). We rather argue that the crisis narrative(s) significantly increased their legitimacy and use.

The EU is now faced with the problem of having to make sense of these events and policies. Meaning production through narratives is especially crucial for bordering and migration policy in the EU, since Europe's borders are "fuzzy" and therefore contested. Narratives about where Europe's borders lie and who is inside or outside these borders are not just about the naturalization of existing, hard physical borders (and related policies), but also about the construction of possible borders through defining an imaginary European identity. The EU has a large selection of imaginaries about its own borders, and it regularly draws upon and uses them to selectively define its borders. For instance, promising membership in the European family is a key incentive the EU relies on in creating its 'New Borderlands' in the Western Balkans, North Africa, and Turkey.

Member states also engage in narrative construction about their, the EU's, and Europe's borders, and this is where the main focus of this volume lies. Populists in particular see borders as a symbolic resource that can be used to clearly define an 'Us' and a threatening 'Them' (Lamour & Varga, 2017). The dramatization of securitized borders and a constantly looming threat of migrants can be used to provide ontological security to the imagined community inside the border, but also to challenge Brussels elites that purportedly threaten these borders (Scott, 2018). Interestingly, nationalistic populism, though fetishizing the protection of state borders, is also engaged in the construction of national and European identities, the latter paradoxically transcending borders *within* the EU—for example, Hungary's securitization of the southern border was transferred to Transylvanian ethnic Hungarians (Szalai & Kopper, 2020), and broader populist attempts to invoke the myth of a Christian Europe as an argument for border control.<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to bordering and migration, the EU needs to understand the physical limits of its territory and give meaning to those borders and who is to be excluded. The EU's sensemaking of and response to the challenge of migration and borders have been paradoxical at best. First, the EU's policies aimed at dealing with mass migration and the narratives that justify these policies are similar to those of nation states: they involve a territorial element that needs to be secured (Della Sala, 2018). On the one hand, this creates narrative tension as the EU at once represents itself as a post-Westphalian entity that rejects the historical nationalism of Europe, including the hard borders that it implies. This mismatch between the two discourses creates a lack of trust in its citizens. On the other hand, this approach puts

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<sup>3</sup> This logic is not the exclusive domain of nationalist populism; see the controversy around the von der Leyen Commission's suggestion for a commissioner for "the European Way of Life."

the EU at a disadvantage in relation to Eurosceptic, statist populists in its member states, whose own territorial narratives are far less equivocal. Indeed, nationalist populism is exceptionally adept at supplying the historical myths and symbols that can create alternative societal beliefs to counter everyday insecurities. The more inclusionary the belief, the more exclusionary it is outside of the limits of the nation, defined by these beliefs (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 763). Nationalists supply ontological security by offering narratives about a homeland secured from intruders (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 763).

Second, the EU's narratives aimed at decreasing ontological insecurity—by offering narratives on what the EU represents and what its goals are—may create ontological insecurity in other actors, including third countries and the EU's own member states (Della Sala, 2018, p. 268). Through this logic, a progressive crisis narrative (more integration as a solution to the crisis) can be a threat to the state-centered ontological security narratives of certain member states (see e.g., Hungary's or pre-Brexit UK's frequent invocation of a national sovereignty myth). In these narratives, any further attempt at integration on the EU's behalf can be framed as a threat since it involves a tradeoff in terms of unilateral policymaking. Somewhat paradoxically, borders can therefore be symbolically employed by populists not only to create an Other across Europe's borders, but also in the EU itself. Meanwhile, the security narrative about Europe's borders can create ontological insecurity in partner states like Turkey, and rivals like Russia.

To sum up: our point of departure is the claim that the European Union and its member states need narratives in the face of the current series of compound crises. In the BordEUr project the authors focused on these narratives, with a special focus on those that talk about the meaning of borders. What problems do actors highlight? How are these problems framed? What meaning do borders and bordering practices carry? How are policy responses legitimized? How are (if at all) narrative contradictions resolved? Naturally, the EU is not the only actor that is dealing with the problem of ontological insecurity, nor is it the exclusive provider of ontological security. Therefore, the following chapters reflect on narratives from the European, member state, and local levels.

We have selected the migration crisis as our starting point because it underscores the contentious role borders play in European narratives. It also demonstrates narrative tension on the European level, and between EU and member state narratives. The policies devised to mitigate the crisis further complicate the ontological security problem: the Justice and Home Affairs council itself reflects Westphalian territoriality, and EU's as well as member states' bordering practices reproduce links to territoriality, which is fundamentally at odds with the kind of post-territorial narratives the EU tells about itself. These are the inherent contradictions that we explore. Rather than framing the migration crisis as about asylum-seekers and irregular migrants arriving to Europe, we understand it as a crisis of human mobility. By doing so our analysis can gain extended relevance vis-à-vis the crisis of internal mobility, which is of increasing relevance for the United Kingdom, and member states of the Schengen zone. Of course, borders are crucial in understanding other problems the EU faces, from Brexit to the war in Ukraine. We also believe the current COVID-19 pandemic is especially intriguing from a border perspective.<sup>4</sup> The pandemic is briefly explored within some of our case studies as it highlights the same issues that we discussed in the introduction: open borders (Schengen) vs. national security concerns;

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<sup>4</sup> Health is not one of the EU's competences: it mainly falls under state competency. The EU's intervention during at least the first phase of the pandemic was to mainly attempt to bring EU members to an agreement on sharing medical supplies (e.g., stop practices of not exporting medical apparel among member states) — while at the same time it acted against exports of medical equipment to third countries. Additionally, big emphasis was put on the preservation of open borders internally in order for the free flow goods of any kind to continue.

market logic vs. security logic (lockdown effects); and the tension between further integration and statism/nationalism in economic terms.

### **Migration and bordering practices**

Migration has been on the EU agenda for quite some time as a secondary area in EU security policy, and was securitized through gradual, incremental policy change (Léonard, 2011), partly as a response to the increasing strains on the Schengen system in 2015–16 (Ceccorulli, 2019). These incremental policy changes were spurred by events like the increasing death toll on the Mediterranean Sea, the growing inflow of irregular migrants first to Italy and then to Greece, and, most crucially, the civil war in Syria, which led to the “crisis” of 2015. Some experts argue that all these events together put the EU on a dependent path towards a Westphalian, securitized response to the crisis, and normalized a language of emergency vis-à-vis migration to Europe (Ceccorulli & Lucarelli, 2018). Narratives themselves play a crucial role in legitimizing border management practices.

Yet, the EU’s response to a diffused sense of ontological insecurity generated by the migration crisis (and the priori crises of the 2000s) has occurred not only in discursive terms (as speech acts) but also performative ones, as communicative actions. Bordering practices have occurred through not only physical hard borders, but also the rise of new borders as dispersed through society. These new borders are present wherever people, things, or information moves, and this movement or mobility is controlled (Cooper et al., 2016). Borders are more and more diffused as bordering logics do not always take place at state borders, but at multiple sites: airports, roads, travel agencies, or the internet (Cooper et al., 2016; Mitzen, 2018). Borders mean different things to different people, with two obvious examples being security and oppression. They also manifest themselves in different ways, from physical to identarian, and work differently for those on either side of the border. Borders are also more and more removed from the edges of (nation) states through externalization. Hence, the aim of this collection of studies is to also investigate (re)bordering practices in Europe that have occurred because of European societies’ reaction to the migration crisis.

Such practices have not only transformed day-to-day practices (e.g., in airport checks), but also impacted upon the cognitive filters in the minds of the Europeans, who have started to perceive the new borders/controls as the new normal. Such new normality should be understood in flexible terms. The logic of securitization enables the introduction of emergency measures that suppress normal political processes, including limiting civil rights. However, what is visible within the EU is that bordering measures most often do not reach the level of bona fide emergency measures—for instance, they often do not involve military force. Instead, we see the proliferation of what Jef Huysmans (2011) calls “little security nothings”: banal acts of security work ranging from programming algorithms to routine collections of data and monitoring surveillance footage. These acts are less “flashy” than the speech acts that propose security threats, but they nevertheless contribute to securitization processes. In fact, as mentioned, migration policy was only gradually securitized within the EU through incremental institutional policy and institutional change and is still not about emergency measures<sup>5</sup> that suspend the flow of normal politics. This process of soft securitization is also sometimes visible in integration policies.

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<sup>5</sup> However, the constitutionality of lockdowns-as-emergency-measures could be investigated.



As the trigger for these changes, the migration crisis put unprecedented pressure on the European Union's institutions. The 'crisis' revealed the inefficiencies of a common immigration and asylum regime and the uncontrolled influx of irregular migrants highlighted the inherent problems of the Schengen system, leading to political tension among member states with some opting for open door policies, and others securitizing migration as a threat to national security. These opposing points-of-view have since proven to be irreconcilable and contributed to the continued extreme politicization and securitization of migration within the Union. The lack of a common response at the EU level resulted into some member states erecting border fences and introducing/improving border control mechanisms also *within* the Schengen area (re-bordering). Not only do these constructs hinder the free movement of people, but they are also frequently a site of human rights abuses. Thus, this recent partial re-Westphalization of a borderless Europe stands in stark contrast to the EU's self-proclaimed post-Westphalian image. Meanwhile, the EU itself has actively externalized its borders by creating the aforementioned 'New Borderlands' in North Africa, Turkey, and the Western Balkans. Continued proposals on the establishment of external hotspots, the signing of the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, or the cooperation between member state forces, FRONTEX, and border guards in the Balkans all exemplify a trend that runs parallel to internal re-Westphalization. These 'New Borderlands' differ from one another in terms of the nature of the EU-partner relationship. This kind of process in the Balkans is especially fascinating. The region represents a new chapter in border externalization: it is essentially turning into an enclave within the EU, and therefore is the subject of both parallel processes.<sup>6</sup>

Implemented measures are well-known. They range from border patrols and control operations that surveyed maritime routes on the Mediterranean, to the construction of fences, and the reinforcement of the capacity of border controls of cooperative third countries (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2017, p. 62). The new fortified southeastern borderland is made up of a multiplicity of buffer states, each fenced off and each implementing various migration control measures internally, on the EU's behalf.

We therefore suggest that bordering narratives and practices should be seen as working in tandem. This volume is organized into case studies to identify and investigate practices at preexisting borders, as well as the emergence of new borders partly through practices. The chapters explore practices in their multiple forms, and also highlight overlooked practices of bordering beyond states borders (e.g., airports or governmental offices). We seek to answer questions like:

- What is the relationship among the different borders of Europe (different in different areas) and how has it been affected by the migration challenge?
- What bordering narratives and practices can be identified as a response to the so-called migration crisis?
- What are the roles of the EU and EU member states in the process of re-bordering?
- In what sense we can talk of the externalization of border control by the EU, with which means and with which consequences?
- How are borders used symbolically in political discourses across the continent?

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<sup>6</sup> We note that even though the securitization of migration in Europe is a relatively well-researched topic, relatively little has been written on the EU's and its member states' role in bordering practices in the neighborhood. We therefore highlight the added value of the project's focus on the neglected area of the Balkans.

## Structure of the publication

The “BordEUR: New Borderlands” project, which provided the platform for the creation of this volume, boasts a wide range of experts on bordering, migration, EU politics, and security studies. This diversity is also reflected in the country case studies that make up the publication. Chapters offer in-depth analyses of narratives and practices on bordering across cases where old borders reappear and/or new borders are established narratively, or even physically. Dissolving borders within the Union for instance mean different things for Schengen member states that are “frontier states” and experience migration flows directly (Italy and Greece), states that are target states and have reestablished internal borders (Austria), and transit states that represent the external border of the Schengen zone (Hungary). Similarly, EU member states that are outside of Schengen but actively seek to join (Bulgaria) enjoy a different dynamic between European and national policies. Meanwhile, one of the EU’s most influential states, the United Kingdom, has left the Union largely due to an effective narrative campaign that securitized migration, and sought to “take back control” of national borders. To bolster border control within the Union, the EU has sought to actively export border control to ‘New Borderlands’ (Turkey and the states of the Western Balkans), which gave our project its title. But we also should not forget that bordering does not only unfold at state borders, but is exercised more diffusely, on multiple levels, ranging from the EU to local communities. To show the role of borders in migration policy on a local level, the project turned to Barcelona as an illustrative case.

To illustrate these diverse factors, the volume is organized as follows. In Chapter 1, **Michaela Ceccorulli** demonstrates Italy’s performative role in the construction of the Southern border of the European Union. Italy and the EU’s constant iteration has affected discourses and practices, favoring different and sometimes opposite images of borders and their meaning and functions. She argues that a “frontier state” like Italy is inevitably called to implement a series of rules and procedures agreed at the European level for the sake of the entire Union. However, this is not a unidirectional relationship: as Ceccorulli shows, Italy also shapes the borders of the Union whenever its narration and practices transform said borders in cognitive, ideational, and material terms. The chapter shows that this mutually constitutive relation provides a varied selection of often contradictory imaginaries about European borders as both fluid and incredibly impenetrable, as flexible yet rigid, and as inclusive yet widely discriminatory. The migration crisis and the COVID pandemic both instantiated this logic, and they also diminished ontological security in Italy. The chapter specifically looks at the fallout of the migration crisis on Italy’s bordering process. Ceccorulli argues that in crisis situations the provision of security is what is expected and required, hence bordering practices will largely be a function of securitizing narratives. In particular, the chapter identifies three political arguments that make up the securitized narrative on borders. First, that Italy’s border is in fact the Union’s border, and should be securitized as such. Second, Italy’s experiences with bordering underline the EU’s need to establish and operate in “New Borderlands” in Africa if it wants to remain secure. This externalization also would mean unburdening Italy from protecting European borders. The third argument is that administrative and cognitive borders do play a big role in the definition of the main beliefs typifying the national community. Narrations and actions aimed at drawing the contours of rights and inclusion possibilities granted to migrants and asylum-seekers all mirror Italy’s changing conceptions of herself and of her defining traits.

Chapter 2 discusses the policies and politics of de- and re-bordering in Austria between 1995 and 2021. **Ivan Josipovic, Sieglinde Rosenberger, Helena Segarra, and Magdalena Übleis-Lang**

identify key measures, legal acts and international agreements, and the actors that drive the transformation of national borders into a supra- and internationally governed border area. The authors divide the investigated period into two phases. Phase one (1995–2014) marked a gradual deinstitutionalization of national borders because of EU Schengen area integration. The migration crisis and the COVID pandemic in phase two (2014–) halted this process, leading to the reintroduction of intra-Schengen border controls and a renewed focus on national territorial bordering. The authors demonstrate the transformation of a national model of border control, focusing on territorial borderlines, into a hybrid national-European model of dispersed control, implying simultaneous re- and de-bordering. This hybrid model is characterized by overlapping border areas that are governed nationally, supranationally, and internationally. This means that border controls in Austria no longer exclusively focus on the territorial borderline but reach within and beyond national territory. Meanwhile, intra-Schengen border controls that had previously been considered neither tools of immigration control for asylum-seekers nor as means of fighting pandemics have taken on a new meaning. While unilateral bordering and the return of the hard border may create the impression that states are regaining sovereignty, the authors claim that these measures potentially foil solidarity and coordinated action within the European Union, acting as makeshifts for durable solutions such as distribution schemes for asylum-seekers or harmonized rules for mobility during pandemics.

In Chapter 3 **Alexandra Prodromidou** and **Petros Golitsis** posit that the Greek response to the migration crisis has been based on two types of narrative: security and humanitarianism, both reflective of wider European narrative response. In Greece, however, the two clashing narratives coexist together with EU foreign policy narratives, to reassure self-identity. Prodromidou and Golitsis argue that despite progressive narratives, in practice post-2014 EU migration governance was mainly treated as a security issue, rather than a humanitarian one. This, however, is not a departure from previous more humanitarian policies, as the ‘foundational’ EU narrative would argue, but rather a move in practice towards cementing a more integrated security process against irregular migration inside the EU borders. Nonetheless, the authors suggest that in the process of prioritizing the safeguarding of its internal market and liberal democracy by securitizing its external borders, the EU creates ontological insecurities for front-line EU members regarding the impact that their membership has on the extent of control they have over their own borders and the manner of solidarity expected by other member states. Within this context, the Greek experience of the EU border ‘crises’ is of particular interest: the country played, and continues to play, a central role in the securitization narratives of defending the Union’s internal mobility and external borders. For Greece, the so-called migration crisis came as the latest in a series of ‘crises.’ Therefore, the notion of solidarity has featured prominently in the national narratives of the dominant parties in power since 2014 to express the ontological (in)securities of Greece as an EU member state on the borders of the Union, as well as make sense of the country’s borders, both national and EU, in the new borderlands. The chapter examines three occasions where Greek borders acquired a different meaning in relation to Greece’s EU membership within the framework of the migrant ‘crisis.’ The closure of the border with North Macedonia assisted by other EU members that limited Greece’s access to the Schengen Zone and transformed the country into a buffer state; the EU-Turkey agreement, which bound Greece and Turkey into a buffer area of outsourcing migration management and thus expanded the EU’s influence beyond its physical borders; and the 2020 New Pact on Asylum and Immigration, which cements the fluidity of EU borders outside EU territory by de-territorializing EU borders and transforming them into non-territories. Throughout these stages solidarity towards Greece as a front-line EU member state took the

very specific form of support towards enhanced deterrence of irregular migration into the EU and ‘à la carte/flexible solidarity.’

Turkey is a new borderland state that is an essential partner in the externalization and management of the EU’s borders. Meanwhile, EU conditionality has created a distinct legal and institutional structure in Turkey in the realm of migration. Turkey’s involvement in the migration crisis, **Basak Alpan** explains in Chapter 4, reflected the European framing of the crisis, and the conviction that the EU’s “crisis response” had to do with borders and border management. The chapter looks at recent developments in bordering narratives during the migration crisis, focusing on the framing of Syrian refugees on Turkish political scene. Alpan argues that unlike in many EU member states, the migration crisis in Turkey was de-securitized at both the narrative and practice levels, seeing the reception of the Syrian refugees as a “moral” and “ethical” move. The main reason for the lack of a securitization of migrants and Turkey’s borders is that Syrian refugees were never seen as a threat to the ontological security of the Turkish state and Turkish citizens. Still, the chapter demonstrates that at the practice level (bordering policy) some securitization still unfolded following the 2015’s increase in terrorist attacks and the July 2016 coup attempt. However, even though Turkish politicians invoked the discourse of existential national security threats and made attempts to securitize Turkey’s southeastern border, this narrative shift did not affect the framing of refugees and migrants. Instead, migrants and refugees were exclusively securitized through practice. As such, Alpan offers a critique of the Copenhagen School’s understanding of securitization by suggesting that securitization can unfold through practice rather than speech acts. Instead of an overall discursive securitization of the migration crisis, we see an “everyday securitization” of Syrian refugees.

Chapter 5 looks at an outlier case: Hungary. A member of the Schengen zone, Hungary acted as a transit state on the Balkan Route until the route’s effective closure with the EU-Turkey agreement in 2016. The country’s rightwing populist government under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán achieved notoriety in 2015 for its harsh anti-immigration rhetoric, often brutal treatment of migrants and refugees, and the construction of a militarized border fence on the Hungarian-Serbian border. Hungary’s discourse on migration and bordering practices has since proliferated across the EU, and the country has received only an extremely low number of migrants and refugees—which remain hidden from the average citizen. Despite the lack of migrants, the government’s discourse has changed very little. In fact, as **András Szalai** shows, it has expanded from the migrant as the Other threatening others, from civil society to the EU, to opposition parties fulfilling the same role. To account for the surprising staying power of the border-threatening Migrant Other, Szalai draws lessons from ontological security and populism studies to demonstrate how rightwing populists like Orbán utilize borders as symbolic resources in crisis narratives that clearly frame an Us and a threatening Them. Rightwing populists use the dramatization of securitized borders and a constantly looming threat of migrants and pandemics to provide ontological security to the imagined community inside their borders. And they also challenge “Brussels elites” that supposedly threaten these borders. By analyzing the Orbán government’s rhetoric on borders, the chapter illustrates how populists utilize crisis narratives not to mitigate, but exacerbate ontological insecurities, and thereby exert control over their populations. Szalai thus argues that Hungary’s governing party relies on crisis and bordering narratives to legitimize illiberal practices that undermine liberal democracy itself.

Chapter 6 investigates Bulgaria’s special role as an EU member state that is out of the Schengen area but which is still committed to securing the EU’s external border in the Black Sea and the land border with Turkey. In the chapter, **Plamen Ralchev** argues that Bulgarians still perceive the country’s southern

border with Turkey as a hard border. Despite Bulgaria's 2004 accession to NATO, the Bulgarian-Turkish border is still perceived as "the Border," the "ultimate border of Europe." Ralchev posits that Bulgarians deeply self-perceive that they live on the borderland of Europe, a perception rooted in both the Cold War and historical memory about relations with the Ottoman Empire. Because of these factors pertinent to ontological security, border-thinking in Bulgaria has always permeated all levels of public and individual life: cognitive, identity-related, and material. Ralchev argues that the migration crisis strengthened this kind of thinking as Bulgaria became more clearly aware of its role as an external border of the EU. The political discourse has gradually shifted towards populist securitization of borders and migration, a discourse that has been adopted by all mainstream parties. Yet Ralchev also draws attention to the EU's role in Bulgaria's bordering practices. Here, similar to its role in the Western Balkans, the EU acts as a disciplinary agent with a mobilizing effect on both institutional performance and public awareness about the EU's external border security. The Bulgarian public generally perceives the EU as a demanding actor and relies on the EU for policy judgement and endorsement. Therefore, Bulgarian governments intuitively keep measures taken in tune with EU guidelines to demonstrate that Bulgaria is a loyal and diligent EU member state and duly contributes to the overall security of the Union.

The states of the Western Balkans witnessed the migration crisis from a distinctly non-EU perspective. As transit countries along the so-called Balkan route of migration, they gained firsthand experience with migration control, and became instrumental to the EU's response. Meanwhile, as de facto or would-be candidate states, their policy responses were heavily influenced by European interest. In Chapter 7, **Stefano Bianchini, Silvia Cittadini, and Marco Zoppi** suggest that the Western Balkans region represents a fragile context of fragmented local societies that are still dealing with unresolved issues connected to the legacy of the 1990s wars and unsuccessful regional cooperation. Nevertheless, these countries still cooperated among themselves, and with the EU, in the management of migration flows by improving border control capacities, exchanging information, and ultimately reducing irregular migration. The authors argue that the Union, in an attempt to secure the Schengen system externally, has also made borders in the Western Balkans "thicker" through measures such as joint border patrols involving police of EU members, and the provision of surveillance equipment and financial resources to establish and run refugee camps in the region. Through these and other measures, the Western Balkans have become a 'New Borderland' within an asymmetric border regime that involves EU members and EU candidates, as well as EU Schengen and EU non-Schengen members. The chapter assesses the consequences of practices and narratives of border control and migration management in the Western Balkans in conjunction with the specific regional perceptions of (in)security that are rooted in the region's recent past, showing that it is impossible to detach the impact of migration from societal representations of "borders," "refugees," and of ethno-cultural categories which draw on narratives connected to traumatic histories, security, and nationalism. Since Western Balkan countries engaged in the securitization of the crisis, not least to boost their EU credentials, their societies have experienced increasing insecurity due government inaction and the lack of long-term strategies for migration management and integration. The authors show that the Western Balkans' experiences of ontological insecurity can therefore be connected directly to the EU's actions, notably the unpredictability of both Western Balkans' accession to the EU and the EU's externalization of migration management. Even though the six investigated countries engaged in intense cooperation with the EU in terms of bordering, this cooperation has not translated necessarily into more security, especially in its ontological sense, for regional governments and their citizens. The six Western Balkans countries have mainly cooperated under the inputs received from

Brussels on security matters, developing scarce ownership of policies and instruments to tackle migration challenges in the region. In doing so, the regional governments have been more oriented towards meeting the security needs of the EU, rather than their own.

In Chapter 8 **Owen Parker** claims that accounts of Brexit that focus on increased migration after the 2004 opening of British labor markets as a key factor in the Leave campaign's success overstate negative material outcomes and at the same time understate the socially-constructed and psychological nature of the anti-free movement of people (FMoP) politics that became so prominent in the United Kingdom in the latter half of the 2000s. Parker traces the ways in which the FMoP was politicized, highlighting the ways in which EU citizens were securitized, particularly in the 2007–2016 period. This securitizing discourse resulted in many British citizens regarding inward EU migration and 'migrants' as an existential threat, or, in other words, as a threat to their own ontological security. The EU migrant was most commonly conveyed as a threat to the economic security of UK citizens, whereas other narratives were more transgressive in racializing the EU migrant as non-citizen and presenting the migrant as threat to supposedly fundamental British values and "way of life." Despite his thorough critique of these securitizing moves, Parker cautions against an approach that seeks to uncritically de-securitize the politics of FMoP by returning us to an ostensibly 'normal' or 'liberal' politics. Such 'normal' politics often involves the championing of economically virtuous subjectivities and a concomitant castigation of the economically 'delinquent.' Such tendencies were apparent in New Labour's liberal policies on FMoP, which identified EU citizens as 'good' economic migrants. This kind of discourse welcomed the 'entrepreneurial' or economically independent EU migrant, and thus partially reflected the EU's own (implicit) and supposedly post-national or 'post-Westphalian' accounts of what an ideal-typical mobile EU citizen could and should be. Notably, Parker shows, such discourses remained present on the Remain side of the debate in the context of Brexit. However, these supposedly welcoming discourses are not without their own potential exclusions. In particular, the designation of the mobile 'entrepreneur' as the ideal actor creates various alternative 'Others,' in particular economically vulnerable or 'dependent' citizens like migrants, and justifies problematic policies of exclusion.

Chapter 9 takes the logic of the volume to the city level. **Ricard Zapata-Barrero's** analysis, entitled "Urban resilience and ontological security: analyzing de-bordering processes in Barcelona," combines ontological security with the concept of resilience and uses both to investigate Barcelona's policies vis-à-vis migrants and their integration. The chapter's approach is unique within European studies, migration studies, and security studies, while its explicit focus on de-bordering and the scale of its empirics both make it a welcome addition to the volume. The chapter's main argument is that ontological security is the normative foundation of resilience: ontological insecurity means a crisis of the Self, which must be reestablished through routines. These routines are what resilience strategies supply. Resilience in general terms is the ability of a system to adapt to a variety of changing conditions and withstand shocks while maintaining its essential functions. For the purposes of the chapter, resilience refers to "a policy strategy for empowering cities and developing urban capacities and learning to govern with the spectrum of uncertainties, hazards, and risks related to migration-related stresses." Based on this concept, the chapter asks the question: how do the state's bordering practices affect migrant-city relations, and how do cities like Barcelona practice de-bordering strategies? In the chapter's narrative, Barcelona exemplifies a local, progressive, and immigration-friendly actor, whereas the state (and to a lesser extent, the European Union) is the antagonist. In this often-antagonistic relationship between the two levels of governance, city officials seek to empower migrants against structural pressures (so-called stressors), chief among them

state policies that impede successful policies on the city level. This clash of two scales produces ontological insecurity for the city, which manifests for instance in a lack of cohesion (e.g., the rise of xenophobia). Zapata-Barrero argues that resilience is essentially achieved *against* state interests. This is what the chapter terms proactive (progressive) resilience.

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## Chapter 1

### Italy and EU's Co-constitutive Bordering Effort

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#### **Introduction**

Italy plays a performative role in the construction of the (southern) border of the European Union. Her actions are simultaneously affected and affect the European border and its meaning. In fact, a frontier state is inevitably called to implement a series of rules and procedures agreed at the European level for the sake of the entire Union: the implementation since 2015 of the hotspot approach as a new bordering tool is a case in point and has been widely covered by the literature (see for example Campesi, 2018). In turn, Italy shapes the border of the Union whenever its narrative and practices transform borders in cognitive, ideational, and material terms. The iteration of this mutually constitutive relation provides extraordinarily variegated images of European borders as contemporarily fluid and incredibly impenetrable, as stretchable yet rigid, as inclusive yet widely discriminatory.

As explained below, (re)bordering practices seems to be inescapable for states and more so in times of crisis when uncertainty crumbles core belief systems and tests institutional capacity and preparedness ('resilience' even, to use a recurrent jargon). They are key to actors' aim to discover, uncover, or even reproduce ontological security. Italy is no exception, having been shaken hard by multiple and concurrent crises over the last years. The economic crisis first, the 'refugee crisis' then and lastly the COVID pandemic have repeatedly questioned the country's ontological security, its priorities, its alignments, and resoluteness along with main values. This chapter specifically looks at the fallout of the 'refugee crisis' on Italy's bordering process, though the effects of all three crises and their main features are hardly understandable on their own.

As seen, if insecurity looms large, the provision of security is what is expected and required: bordering exercises in this sense largely depend on securitizing moves enacted and their legitimizing arguments. Italy is hence analyzed in this chapter by looking at its main securitizing narratives and matching bordering practices. Considering three political constellations running the country from 2016 to 2020, this chapter has a twofold objective: first, to consider bordering practices according to their legitimizing arguments; and second, to evaluate their implications on migrants' treatment and on EU practices and overall ontology.

#### **Setting the context: Italy's unnormal normalcy**

When the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 sealed the eastern Mediterranean corridor and rather optimistically and arbitrarily signaled the end of the 'refugee crisis,' Italy was everything but relieved at this apparent solution the Union had pulled out of a hat (Ceccorulli, 2019). Ever since, Italy has started fearing a diversion of flows of the many stranded in the Balkans towards its territory through the Adriatic route, adding to those soaring along the Mediterranean one. Anxiety over becoming 'the parking place of Europe' was transmitted by the media as EU member states fortified internal borders out of concerns over

secondary movements. Italy's apprehension at that point was motivated by two elements: first, the requirement (now inescapable) as requested by the Dublin Regulation that Italy fully perform its role as first country of entrance; second, the awareness of acting within a still largely imperfect asylum structure. When inflows towards the country reached a new peak in 2016, apprehension turned into insecurity and imbued, even though with diverse emphasis, the political debate. What followed in terms of both security moves and implementing practices was an attempt by multiple political majorities to govern the phenomenon through the definition of different sets of borders: some defining the perimeter of the national political community, some defining Italy's imagined position (opportunistic at times) in the European Union, and still others going as far as reframing the borders of the Union.

Indeed, this complex process has mirrored nuances proper to the political majority in power as it is seen below. But some traits have persisted, unchanged and irrespective of the political color, along these days to provide a more solid and decisive contribution to the Union's bordering effort. In particular, Italy has tried to define a perfect matching between its borders and those of the Union: this exercise has been mostly devoted at enticing Union and member states' solidarity in governing migration, with the aim to erase those cognitive borders that still characterize the issue area and that indeed display quite concrete distributional effects. Besides, and somehow relatedly, Italy has constantly tried to stretch the external border southwards, reconfiguring the Union's geographic border—and with those, relations with a new neighborhood.

More undetermined and schizophrenic has been instead the bordering of the national community. Combining wholehearted actions with blunt disrespect of migrants' rights, taking accommodating and inclusive stances while contracting basic liberal rights—Italy has hardly made up its mind about the basic values supporting her being. Ultimately, this has blurred the EU's already fuzzy border on the matter. Ambiguity and frequent reliance on a restrictive definition of borders cripple rather than embolden Italy and the Union's ontological security, perverting their supposed, imagined, and loudly heralded distinctiveness.

The five-year period of consideration together with the alternation of different political majorities offer a perfect occasion to appreciate continuities and discontinuities in Italian political discourse and practice. Between December 2016 and June 2018 Italy was run by a center-left/center-right coalition. Throughout 2016 Italy faced the largest inflow of asylum-seekers ever experienced (Redazione ANSA, 2016), while significant lows were registered along other Mediterranean corridors. Minister for the Interior Marco Minniti, an experienced politician of the left, assertively shaped a Mediterranean policy aimed at governing flows and brought the Union's attention (and pockets) to this geographical region, with a 'model' or 'vision' to be implemented in Libya. After that government, Italy displayed the first full-populist western European government ever, run through a contract between the Five-star movement and the League, a party with traditional antimigration stances. As had occurred in other historical moments when the League (previously Northern League) made it into the leading coalition, the seat of the Interior was occupied by a prominent figure in the party—this time Matteo Salvini. The dubbed 'yellow-green government' experience sunk in August 2019. Italy was then run by a coalition between the Five-star movement and some parties from the center and the left until February 2021, with Luciana Lamorgese, with a long experience as officer in the Ministry of the Interior, covering now the highest seat within. The last phase is the one that saw Italy endure, first among European countries, the impact of SARS-COV-19 (Covid), something which, alongside health, brought immense repercussions in social, economic, and

political terms. Indeed, the frequent political turnabouts have not favored comprehensive and more importantly consistent approaches; the issue is not new for Italy, though. In fact, the patchy, reactive, and ever-emergency traits of its approach to migration have been frequently attributed to this peculiar feature.

The period of observation is all the more interesting in that it displays different inflows' intensity. Ultimately, this allows us to gauge both the salience of the issue and its manipulation by political leaders; the relevance attributed to the issue as a defining element for Italy's ontology; and, ultimately, the weight of relations with the Union in bordering attempts and practices.

The next sections elaborate on the bordering attempts mentioned above, trying to combine them with their imbued securitization logic.

### **Italy as the Union's border**

One of the leitmotifs of Italy's political discourse has been the one reminding the public that 'Italy's border is in fact the Union's border.' As Minister Salvini half explained and half admonished, "the plan is that finally the EU takes care of the defense of its borders. That are also ours" (Cremonesi, 2018). At first sight, this type of argument seems to stress a geographical and even territorial definition of a border whereby Italy clearly draws the contours of the Union's 'hard' limes. Clearly there is some truth to this interpretation, as Salvini's words made clear through the use of military parlance. In this sense, hard borders would collimate with cognitive ones: Italy is the doorstep of a regionally-integrated organization where common values, norms, and rules apply that differ from other geographical spaces. That space has hence to be cocooned, 'defended,' protecting the Mediterranean and Italy as well (Cremonesi, 2018). According to Minister Salvini, defending the external border was key to removing internal border controls introduced during the 2015 crisis and kept ever since (Walt, 2018). However, rather than referring to an external audience, this argument is mostly addressed to the Union. Reminding the Union that Italy locates, perceives itself, and demands to be recognized as part of the Union is intended to stimulate 'solidarity' from other member states, recalling such values as constitutive of the Union and hence integral part of its ontology. As explained by Minister Lamorgese, "solidarity principles stand at the basis of the European construction and integration" (Sarzanini, 2019a); without solidarity it is not possible to set in motion a reception policy reflecting the EU's values and to overcome the sterile binary logic of primary and secondary movements (Spagnolo, 2020). Having that in mind provides an image of borders in less rigid terms than anticipated.

This logic has been a constant in Italy's discourse, irrespective of political colors and to the limit of hypocrisy when the same was taken forward by formations with quite sovereignist stances. The argument has been raised time and again. For example, during the 2015 refugee crisis, the request was to speed up the relocation decisions redistributing asylum-seekers from specific countries among member states; afterwards emphasis was put on updating the Union's ethnic profiles for relocation to reach more nationalities, reflecting the new composition of flows (Ziniti, 2017). But perhaps more vigorously it has resonated in the debate about search and rescue activities in the Mediterranean, particularly relevant in the aftermath of the refugee crisis. All political formations have vigorously asked for a regionalization of search and rescue activities in the Mediterranean: almost the entirety of disembarkations of rescued persons have occurred in Italy, causing at times of intense inflows and particular hardship for the Italian

reception system. As reported by Minniti (2017), it is hard to imagine an international rescue mission and at the same time reception by a sole country.

The quest for a European search and rescue system would indeed push the border of the Union outward to the sea, partly reconfiguring this space as the Union's in terms of effective intervention and responsibility. This reconfiguration would not fix new borders, however, for the sea seldom recognizes some, at least in practical terms; it would be closer to what has been called in the literature a 'borderland' (Del Sarto, 2021).

Despite efforts, Italy's call for solidarity has been unmet till these days, with huge consequences. This held true for example when the reiterated call by Minniti to FRONTEX and other member states for a change of Operation Triton rules of engagement during were sunk in summer 2017. Looking at timing, one might for example infer that member states' blind eyes on the matter might have pressured Italy into signing a code of conduct for NGOs operating in the Mediterranean by underlining the operative necessity to govern a 'jungle' (Martini, 2017), and might have decisively deepened and accelerated cooperation with Libya, giving shape to the bordering logic explained below. During the populist government, Italy's unheard voice has accelerated the dismissal of operation EUNAVFOR MED Sophia, a European presence unique in the Mediterranean and never replaced, ending the likelihood of a European reconfiguration at sea. Hardening the stance against NGOs, in June 2018 Minister Salvini mandated the closing of Italian ports to these organizations, with the explanation that most of these wore the flag of other member states and did not share Italy's efforts on reception. As with Minniti, the end objective was changing the rules of engagement of missions in the Mediterranean, allowing for rotating disembarkations. To force its hand, Salvini was particularly hostile towards the EU, threatening to close ports even to EU missions (e.g., in Themis, Triton, and Sophia) and, according to experts, truly orchestrated 'crises' at sea in an effort to spectacularize his moves by 'hostaging' vessels and questioning the urgency and the necessity of disembarkations 'in a safe place' (Cerasa, 2020a).<sup>7</sup> These missions were international only 'on paper,' and instead only Italian when it came to economic support (Redazione romana, 2018). As pointed out, "The European Themis mission is composed of 32 vessels, 30 of which Italians': how can you affirm it is a European mission?" (Romano, 2018). Italy's behavior was stirring at times hypocritical reactions from other Member States, accusing Italy of 'cynicism and irresponsibility' (Cremonesi, 2018). If Salvini's move went beyond real objectives, as testified by the skirmish within the Italian Minister of Defense who instead praised Operation Sophia (commanded by Italy) and the significance it held for Italy, the operation was finally discontinued. In fact, no European solutions emerged and after a final phase which saw the paradoxical presence of a naval operation without a naval component (with no anti-smuggling and rescuing activities), the EU seemed to abandon previously alluded-to security interests: anti-smuggling efforts and migrants' lives.

The last of the three governments got closer to a shared system than the others with the 2019 Malta Summit. Minister Lamorgese (2019) explained that, "in coordination with Germany, the idea has been taken forward that who lands in Italy lands in Europe." Lamorgese explained that a new solidarity environment had settled among Member States, necessary for an effective sharing of the problem (Sarzanini, 2019b). A mechanism for the redistribution of migrants called by the Commission (and not by Italy) based on automatic relocation procedures was envisaged and served two objectives: first a more equitable distribution of burdens among member states; second, reduced uncertainty over responsibility

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<sup>7</sup> Author's online interview with Matteo Villa, ISPI Research Fellow, 25 May 2021.

on reception (Sarzanini, 2019b). In the words of Lamorgese, the measure equated to the overcoming of the Dublin Regulation (which in itself is a powerful cognitive barrier within the EU both for migrants and among member states as the argument about primary and secondary movements highlights), for, after a first security and sanitary control undertaken by Italy, those arrived would be registered in EURODAC by the receiving country (Cerasa, 2020b). And yet, the system run on a voluntary basis and enclosed a limited number of European states.

Moreover, the outbreak of the pandemic has struck a lethal blow to the feeble voluntary mechanism at play, leaving Italy with increasing inflows from Tunisia to deal with and poor instruments to cope. During summer 2020, in fact, rising and mostly unchecked disembarkations were reported by Minister Lamorgese. The compounded problem of intercepting these inflows (hence also undertaking proper sanitary check) and the fast spreading of the Coronavirus has indeed affected perceptions related to inflows, perceptions largely engrossed by populist formations underlining the health threat posed by irregular migrants. Indeed, Minister Lamorgese explained in an attempt to defuse concern that the problem of sanitary checks was seemingly valid for all persons entering Italy, for work, study or tourism reasons (Sarzanini, 2020). However, this has made it all the more difficult to organize proper reception, for the local levels engaged in reception showed strong resistance. Even in the case of properly tracked inflows (undergoing as they normally do security and sanitary checks) reception in the available structures was rendered difficult because of the exigencies of social distancing.

Against this backdrop, the decision to ‘quarantine vessels’ off Italy’s ports represented indeed a new bordering system (Denaro, 2021). Together with the sanitary threat ‘imported to Italy’ by migrants alluded by antimigration formations, confining migrants afloat may have deepened the perception among Italian public opinion of asylum-seekers as ‘incubators’ even if the measure was exactly taken to ward off this eventuality by disposing proper sanitary checks (Cerasa, 2020a) and alleviate pressure on hotspots (Ziniti, 2020). In turn, the distress faced by Italy because of new arrivals and blocked relocations to other member states may have urged close member states (France and Austria) to strengthened physical controls at borders, for fear of ‘secondary movements.’ In turn, this fed the perception of Italy’s solitude vis-à-vis the challenge, as explained by this narrative.

### **Italy stretching out the EU’s borders**

A second argument taking the lead after the refugee crisis is that the EU has to operate in Africa as main decisive context for its own future. As Minniti (2017) made clear, “the governance of migratory flows is to be played outside national borders and does not only involve and interest Italy. It has to do with Africa and Europe.” Also, “the governance of migration cannot be limited to the territory of the Union and in particular to migrants’ arrival on Italian shores. It has first to be faced in Africa, where it has its roots and where economic, environmental, and humanitarian causes guide the phenomenon” (De Maizièrè & Minniti, 2017). And again “the decisive game for Europe is no longer being played to the East, rather to the South. Our future is strongly linked to Africa’s” (Foschini, 2017), with a specific reference to the challenges posed by terrorism, demography, and strategic resources. Talks about a ‘Marshall Plan for Africa’ were evocative about the scope and the resoluteness of the engagement shown by Italy. When flows towards Italy from Tunisia started to resume in summer 2020, amid the COVID epidemic, Minister Lamorgese admonished the EU to intervene effectively to reduce the effects of the economic hurdles facing

the North African country, because a slowdown of the pressure could only be attained in Africa (Sarzanini, 2020). Indeed, this type of argument has visibly connected migration policy with foreign policy more broadly. This has partly contributed, though unintentionally, to the securitization of migration by linking insecurity conditions in Africa with possible massive and chaotic flows, and by associating migration governance with domains mostly using coping security tools, while probably diverting resources on useful development chapters (Ministero degli Esteri, 2020).

Among others, a narrative matching the EU border Libya's southern border was advanced. This contribution to EU's re-bordering is peculiarly Italian; in 2016 Minister Minniti inaugurated a new phase of relations with the North African country in an attempt to gain (primarily financial) support from the Union. Every initiative was coordinated with and brought to the EU level, such as a July 2017 meeting in Rome with Libyan mayors, which saw the participation of the Commissioner for Internal Affairs Dimitris Avramopoulos. The idea to be sedimented was that the southern border of Libya was in fact EU's border, explained the Italian Minister (Cazzullo, 2017). In the words of Minniti, Italy's assertive role and the assiduous involvement of the EU had the added benefit of balancing the EU's international projection with a pivot to the south (Cuscito & Caracciolo, 2018). Essentially, the strategy's pillars involved building up Libyan capacity on anti-smuggling, maritime and terrestrial border controls, information exchange, the development of economic projects, and reception centers' conditions.

This attempt has visibly and easily crossed the broader international attempt to restore security and statehood in Libya, in complete disarray after the Quaddafi regime was toppled in 2011. In this sense, Italy's strategy has wisely related the insecurity situation of the country and the lack of sovereignty prerogatives with the growing threat of human smuggling, endangering human lives as testified by the abysmal number of deaths in the Mediterranean particularly in 2016. As Minniti pointed out, human smuggling is a real threat to Europe as a whole: assisting smugglers' deadly game against desperate migrants could not be a choice (De Maizière & Minniti, 2017). Closing the Saharan smuggling industry and the supporting bases in Libya represented, for Minniti, a 'democratic duty' (Ziniti, 2017), for any talk about reception could only happen in the context of the control of illegality—reiterating, hence, the legitimacy of the vision. Moreover, it was explained, a democracy cannot follow and passively react to processes governed by criminals (Foschini, 2017). But the rush to Libya was supported by another securitizing narrative: recalling the June 2017 arrival of more than 25 vessels carrying 12,500 migrants in less than two days, Minniti pointed out that the risk was very high of intense tensions in the country (Ciriaco, 2017). Taking action was hence no choice.

Different security moves have been at play, somehow legitimizing the necessity to extend the EU's intervention southwards. Minister Minniti made clear that "if Africa is well, we are well as well," alluding to the fact that insecurity in Africa translates into insecurity for the EU (Di Giacomo, 2017). Minniti inferred that smugglers' exploitation of irregular immigrants' hopes could not but endanger their lives: hence, the inevitability of action. Throughout 2017 relations with Libya towards 'political stabilization' had been intense, covering different policy fields connected by the attempt at curbing irregular immigration (Camilli, 2020; Ceccorulli & Varvelli, 2021).

Border-wise, the strategy carried many implications. First, the definition of Libya as a transit country created implications in terms of practices: ten vessels have been donated to Libya to control departures, personnel have been trained, and peace has been promoted between south Saharan tribes, allowing for a better control of relevant smuggling corridors there (Ziniti, 2017). This point is not trivial,

for Libya has been a destination country for many migrants coming from both neighboring states and Asia (Frowd, 2020). Alongside Libya, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania have been defined as ‘transit countries’ (Weymouth, 2018), easing the image of their borders as particularly fluid for both entering and exiting. Second, the implicit definition of the country as ‘safe’ has been legitimized by Italy and the EU’s presence. Emphasis was put on the funds provided by the Union to reception centers under the responsibility of the United Nations Refugee Agency and the International Organization for Migration. In the words of Minister Minniti, Europe and Italy’s training of the Libyan Coast Guard had already ensured the saving of 10,000 lives from deadly waters, bringing migrants back to Libya (De Maizièrè & Minniti, 2017). Indeed, this narrative has always been hugely contradictory, as evidenced for example in Minniti’s insistence that migrants could not be trapped in camps, fattening smugglers’ trafficking (De Maizièrè & Minniti, 2017). Ultimately, this concern motivated the first humanitarian corridors to Italy directly from Libya. Seemingly, Minister Lamorgese (2019) inferred that centers in Libya had to be closed and more humanitarian permits had to be granted. For Minister Salvini, the recognition of Libya as a ‘safe port’ was more a matter of ‘labels’ that the EU had to be quick to affix, rather than the effective verification of safe and decent conditions (Ministero dell’Interno, 2018).

Third, and faithful to its logic, new relations were founded with third countries bordering Libya, most noticeably Niger, Chad, and Mali. With them cooperation has been attempted and more-or-less achieved in a new extensive EU effort, spanning from the governmental to the local level (De Maizièrè & Minniti, 2017). Libya’s reception camps mentioned before were said to ensure smoother procedure for voluntary repatriation (Ziniti, 2017). Besides, and somehow relatedly, the hard borders between Libya and neighboring countries and the Union itself were redrawn. An objective of the strategy was to prevent migrants from reaching Libya in the first place, while a close second was to make the sea border almost impenetrable to by building the control capacities of North African states (Sarzanini, 2019b). Most desirable would be, according to Minister Salvini, the positioning of identification centers in North African countries (Cremonesi, 2018), a likelihood often alluded to but never achieved that would effectively shift the EU’s hard border away from EU territory. In the words of the League Minister, the objective is to avoid migrants’ departure from Africa and entry in Europe: hence, efforts are being undertaken in Africa (Weymouth, 2018).

Here again, political colors have somehow differed, at least from a narrative point of view, on the ‘fluidity’ of borders. Thus, if the strengthening of European repatriation agreements with third states has been strongly emphasized by all formations, non-populist governments have remarked the simultaneous exigence to respect human rights and the nonrefoulement principles and to potentiate humanitarian corridors. This is not to say that the same governments were not accused of denying human rights. Nor does this mean that Salvini has acted in full disregard of the vulnerable, for humanitarian corridors have continued under his term, renewed (with Ethiopia) and even opened anew with Jordan and Niger (Ministero dell’Interno, 2019). However, the rhetoric has been quite different, producing different results in the shaping of the national community’s not hard but certainly cognitive borders.

### **Administrative and cognitive borders**

The refugee crisis has also impacted Italy’s conceptions of herself and of her defining traits. This has been mostly mirrored by narratives and actions aimed at drawing the contours of rights and inclusion

possibilities granted to migrants and asylum-seekers. Here, the differences between political colors have been more visible, but the overall approaches have been hardly consistent. For example, while Minister Minniti passed a law in March 2017 to allow unaccompanied minor migrants to remain in Italy because “our country should never lose track of the primary objective to protect who flees from war and famines” (Di Giacomo, 2017), he simultaneously furthered the elimination of a second-degree appeal for asylum-seekers, motivating the choice with the objective to reduce the amount of time for a decision on the status.

Overall, the populist government has not only been predictably restrictive but has also challenged main values at the basis of Italy’s and the EU’s ontology. This has been particularly clear in two instances. First, the promulgation of the security decrees overhauling the narrative about the value of integration in Italy (Ponzo, 2018), raising administrative borders against migrants while fencing cognitive ones, a move upgrading support for the party to 30 percent in summer 2018 (Walt, 2018). Touching economic security, a sensitive cord for many Italians, Salvini was paralleling reception and integration to costs: they had to be possibly cut off (Cremonesi, 2018). Among key provisions was the denial of previously granted social inclusion for asylum-seekers, leaving projects in this direction only for already-ascertained refugees (Ministero dell’Interno, 2018). Faithful to this logic, Salvini openly and matter-of-factly reported to have diverted €42 million from the reception to the repatriation dossier, to “balance the books” (Romano, 2018). Humanitarian protection, an added degree of protection that has distinguished Italy among other member states, was also discursively banalized and practically depowered, because inferred to be ‘abused’: “everybody pretends to be ill or homosexual which cannot clearly be the case” (Romano, 2018). Migrants’ appeals were also portrayed as causing a waste of resources ably exploited to enrich some, as most of them were clearly unfounded, like car accidents (Romano, 2018). Emphasizing the difference between wastes (reception) and values (security), beggars and deserving, Salvini explained that funds saved from reduction in expenditure on reception centers were to be used to pay the police’s arrears, “men and women, servants of the State that have worked and have to be paid” (Siamo & Capitale, 2018). Also, with the branding ‘Decreti sicurezza or Decreto Salvini’ (in an attempt at strong personalization), securitization kept feeding itself, implying that more restrictive measures were to provide more security. Besides, among others, the costs and waiting times to apply for citizenship were increased.

Indeed, Salvini’s arguments remarked a significantly different rhetoric from those of other governments, which have instead securitized the lack of integration: “the equation between migration and terrorism is wrong and misleading. However, ever since Charlie Hebdo, it is clear that there exists a relation between terrorism and the lack of integration,” echoed the words of Minister Minniti (Di Giacomo, 2017). According to him, a vital game for the future of the country was being played around the issue of integration, suggesting the profoundly ontological value of the challenge (Di Giacomo, 2017). Also, explained Minister Lamorgese, true integration is a precondition for keeping social cohesion in the country (Sarzanini, 2019b). Efforts have been taken to partly reverse some of the measures of the security decrees, thanks also to the observations advanced by the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella. Attention has been centered around, for example, dampening sanctions for NGO noncompliance (under the radar of the populist government); allowing Prefects to increase funds for the provisions of services for migrants; reintroducing the basics of humanitarian protection (now ‘special protection’); and eliminating the provision prohibiting asylum-seekers’ registration at municipalities, among others.

During the COVID pandemic, migrants endured differentiated treatment: the proposal for a regularization of a significant number of irregular immigrants working in the sanitary and agricultural



sector granted foreigners clear recognition of their vital role for the Italian economy and was considered a measure to strengthen health safety through proper tracking of otherwise undetectable profiles (Bianconi, 2020). On the other hand, though, anti-immigration formations used the pandemic to reiterate the priority of national citizens: because of the economic emergency, certain ‘requests’ were dubbed inappropriate and even out of place. As seen, the pandemic gave rise to a new form of border in the shape of quarantine vessels: if these have been invariably demonized, Interior Minister Lamorgese explained that the tools were compatible with the practices of a civil country, which can never counterpose humanity and security, not even in a pandemic season (Cerasa, 2020a). Quarantine vessels were hence conceived as another instrument, but whose bordering effect was unclear.

Another important aspect of this last logic attains to Italy’s unexpected decision in December 2018 not to approve the Global Compact for Migration, departing from traditional alignment with Western European countries and moving closer to sovereigntist demeanors. Launched in 2016 with the United Nations New York Declaration, the Global Compact for Migration has represented the very first attempt at true international cooperation in the field of migration for the ordered, safe, and legal regulation of flows. Working for months on consultations and negotiations, Italian diplomats were mandated to abstain only few days before its final approval. An analyst close to the ruling yellow-green government judged the pact as ineffective with respect to Italy’s main concern: curbing immigration and the burden of reception (Sacino, 2018). For the then-Minister Salvini, the Compact did not do enough to differentiate between ‘economic’ immigrants and refugees (Bongiorni, 2018). This move, which created more than an embarrassment within the same government, had two important repercussions in terms of the EU’s bordering: by denying the values enshrined in the document, it undermined the values the Union has founded itself upon and, in so doing, its ontology. It has also intensified an already deep fracture among member states, supporting not only restrictive migration policies, but a confrontational approach with respect to the governance of the phenomenon.

If these moves are undoubtedly remolding administrative and cognitive borders in a restrictive way, another subsequent move has had the same effect: the October 2019 release of a ‘safe countries of origin’ list at the initiative of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, something that Italy had always refused to do irrespective of other member states’ positions (Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2019). Indeed, this not only largely blurs borders between issue areas along a now rather consolidated trend in the EU, ‘extending’ the EU’s borders according to the logic described above—it also declassifies international protection by further reducing its applicability, questioning the duties attached therewith, and downscaling the sanctity of the EU’s international protection regime, paralleling protection in the EU with conditions and rights obtainable elsewhere.

## Conclusion

The analysis of Italian bordering efforts has offered a quite variegated picture. As shown, Italy’s and the EU’s constant iteration has affected discourses and practices, favoring different and sometimes opposite images of borders and their meaning and functions.

In particular, three main arguments have been made. First, Italy’s border overlaps with the Union’s border. If many interpretations can be derived from this narrative, the key element has been Italy’s quest for solidarity as part of the EU. Second, Europe’s border should stretch out to the south:

indeed, bordering effects might be different according to whether the effort is aimed at enforcing borders or at defusing them. Overall, this narrative has been decisive in repositioning the EU towards the southern Mediterranean and the African continent more broadly, thus contributing to the (re)drawing of its ontology. Finally, administrative and cognitive borders play a big role in the definition of the main beliefs typifying the national community. Here, some contradictory traits at play have been witnessed especially when practices seemed to run contrary to narratives. In this bordering effort, differences have been noted according to political formation: even though integration was praised more for the sake of societal cohesion and peace than human rights per se, marked securitarian (and hence exclusionary) traits have loomed large with populist formations. Ultimately, this openly challenged a rather ingrained understanding of EU values (and hence of its ontology).

The way in which COVID has reshaped the borders of both Italy and the EU in cognitive and material terms, and how this has impacted their ontologies, has been only tentatively explored and needs further investigation. Evidence so far suggests that the challenge posed by the pandemic has been met by a further thickening of physical, administrative, and cognitive borders.

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## Chapter 2

### **Policies and Politics of De- and Re-bordering: The Case of Austria from 1995 to 2021**

*Ivan Josipovic, Sieglinde Rosenberger, Helena Segarra, and Magdalena Übleis-Lang<sup>1</sup>*

#### **Introduction**

The migration movement in 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic 2020 have precipitated two political crises, urging the governments of EU member states to resort to intensified border control measures. Intra-Schengen borders and EU external borders alike became central in political and academic debate on national sovereignty and further prospects of European integration (Schimmelfennig, 2021). If the creation of the Schengen area constituted a process of deinstitutionalizing EU internal border controls (Schimmelfennig, 2021), then member states' reintroduction of intra-Schengen controls can be considered a disintegrative trajectory. However, cross-border cooperation between member states, which is a result of European integration, has remained intact and in some cases, it has been even further expanded towards non-member states (Mau, 2006).

This chapter analyses border politics and policies in Austria from 1995 to 2021. Starting with Austria's accession to the EU (1995), we map key actors and policies, agreements, and forms of cooperation regarding border politics. Eventually, the chapter provides insights into re- and de-bordering activities against the background of Austria's EU accession and responses to external shocks and crises. Importantly, we demonstrate the transformation of a national model of border control, focusing on territorial borderlines, into a hybrid national-European model of dispersed control, implying simultaneous re- and de-bordering. This hybrid model is characterized by overlapping border areas that are governed nationally, supranationally, and internationally. This means that border controls no longer exclusively focus on the territorial borderline but reach within and beyond national territory (Mau, 2021; Schimmelfennig, 2021).

Analytically, we divide our period of investigation into two phases. The first phase, 1995–2014, is characterized by vertical and horizontal European integration, the adoption of the Schengen acquis, and the eastward enlargement of the EU. In line with legal and political developments in the European Union, Austria dismantled intra-Schengen borders and intensified border management cooperation with neighboring candidate countries. The second phase, 2015–2021, is characterized by two external shocks that brought national border policies back: the crisis of migration governance of 2015/2016 and the COVID pandemic of 2020/2021. In response, Austria introduced and continuously maintained intra-Schengen border controls towards Slovenia and Hungary in 2015, drawing on different exemption provisions of the Schengen Borders Code (SBC). Since May 2018, the maximum of two years of internal border controls regulated by the SBC has been exhausted (Hense-Lintschnig, 2018, p. 23). Furthermore, the federal government ordered the temporary construction of a border fence (2.5 meters high and 3.7 kilometers long) and introduced an annual quota for asylum applications (Rosenberger & Müller, 2020). Likewise, the Assistance Mission of the Federal Armed Forces (*Bundesheer Assistenzinsatz*) has gained

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<sup>1</sup> All authors contributed equally to this chapter.

increasing relevance. Moreover, the government extended its engagement to the Western Balkans region to call for and implement external border controls in the name of the EU (Milivojevic, 2019).

The systematic analysis of border policies underlines that the dynamics of de- and re-bordering exist simultaneously. However, we find that de-bordering is mainly the result of multilateral agreements in the context of EU integration as well as of efforts to externalize border control, while re-bordering is based on unilateral and bilateral initiatives.

For our analysis, we use data on key border control-related laws issued between 1995 and 2021, which was provided by the official legal information system.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, this chapter includes information on bi- and multilateral agreements, treaties, and specific communication with European institutions from the archive of the Parliament of Austria. The document search was based on key terms including *Grenz\** (border), *Grenzraum* (border area), *Grenzraumüberwachung* (border area surveillance), *Grenzkontrolle* (border control), *Grenzübergang* (border crossing), *Schleierfahndung* (dragnet control), *Assistenzeinsatz* (assistance mission), *Schlepperei* (people smuggling), and *Einreise* (entrance). The document analysis is based on the screening of the content and categorization of the actors involved, the types of policies, levels of policymaking, the nature of the policy field, and the policy targets. We have inquired selectively into political debates that accompanied the adoption of key legal changes by drawing on online newspaper articles.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, we discuss certain theoretical approaches towards conceptualizing borders, bordering, and border policies (section 2). In section three, we cover the phase from 1995 to 2014 and describe actors and measures before summarizing the patterns of de- and re-bordering that occurred during the EU expansion. In the last section, we focus on the period from 2015 to 2021, when two critical junctures have impacted internal and external border policies. We end this chapter with some concluding remarks on the progress of and ruptures in European integration.

### Theorizing borders and the politics of border control

[S]tate borders play key roles in the organization of modern societies. They are territorial and symbolic at the same time, marking the geographical limits of the state, as well as suggesting the cohesiveness of the delineated state space. Accordingly, modern state borders establish a purported congruence between the territory of the state and the society they enclose, as the term nation-state implies (Popescu, 2010, p. 293).

As Popescu (2010) points out, state borders are of key importance for organizing and managing movements of goods and peoples. Whereas thoughts on state borders were often reduced to national territorial borderlines until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their conceptualization has changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Milivojevic, 2019; Popescu, 2010). Scholars from various disciplines have refined the understanding of borders as complex phenomena which are governed supra- and bi-nationally. Considerations also include the use of new policing tactics, digital technologies, and private actors such as transportation companies (Agier, 2016; Bigo, 2014; Gerst et al., 2021; Herrmann, 2018; Mau, 2021; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013).

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<sup>2</sup> Rechtsinformationssystem RIS, [www.ris.bka.gv.at](http://www.ris.bka.gv.at).

Drawing on this border study literature, we speak about *hard borders*, that is, territorial borderlines of nation-states with locally entrenched control activities, and *border areas*. Border areas are created in European bi- and multilateral political contexts. They include technical instruments and policing activities that transcend territorial national state borders. These spaces can emerge wherever states might perceive neuralgic migratory routes, furthermore within critical zones around territorial frontiers, and even in urban spaces (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). Accordingly, borders do not disappear if checkpoints along hard border lines are left unguarded. Instead, they become re-localized, moving inwards as well as beyond national territory. They continue carrying out the function of selecting and excluding non-citizens (Mau, 2021). On the one hand, this occurs through immigration laws that allow for internal interceptions and dragnet controls. On the other hand, it takes place through official cooperation with neighboring countries and through engagement in external border controls removed from domestic territory (Andreas, 2003). Sanja Milivojevic (2019, p. 11) illustrates this process with reference to EU candidate countries in the Western Balkans—a region particularly relevant to Austria’s engagement in border politics and the expansion of new European borderlands.

It is thus useful to think of borders not as static structures. Rather, they should be considered in terms of processes of bordering (Newman 2006). Bordering practices function in two directions: re- and de-bordering. The term *bordering* includes various activities relevant to boundary making and management (Schimmelfennig, 2021, p. 316). *Debordering* defines activities that open hard borders and decrease border control. Conversely, *re-bordering* refers to activities that close or tighten borders and increase border control activities (Popescu, 2012, p. 63). In practice, de- and re-bordering activities take place simultaneously and inconsistently. Bordering practices, including opening and closing, dismantling and intensification of border controls, mobilization and immobilization, all take place at the same time (Mau, 2021, p. 18).

Besides the degree and direction of political intervention, one can also address the spatial dimension of border control. Arguably, the delocalization of borders also functions in two directions: towards the interior or the exterior of state territory. Inward delocalization for example includes legal provisions in the Aliens Act that allow for interceptions and dragnet controls. Outward delocalization that reaches beyond the Schengen area involves non-EU member states (but often candidate states) that control migratory routes in order to protect Schengen external borders (Milivojevic, 2019, p. 11). Steffen Mau calls this practice the exterritorialization of border controls (Mau, 2021, p. 135ff), while Michael Jandl (2008) refers to it as the externalization of borders. Not only is the externalization of border controls conducted by other countries, but it can also involve private carriers being obliged to control whether a person transported by them is entitled to enter the territory surrounding a certain destination.

### **Transforming the hard border into a border area: 1995 to 2015**

Throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Austria was located between the two power blocs involved in the Cold War. It acted as a neutral country and presented itself as open to refugees who had fled their communist countries beyond the Iron Curtain (Graf & Knoll, 2017, p. 226). Furthermore, Austria engaged in bilateral labor recruitment agreements in the 1960s, especially with Turkey and former Yugoslavia.



Humanitarian and labor immigration both turned into salient political issues that were discussed throughout the 1990s. While Austria granted protection to refugees fleeing the Yugoslavian war in the 1990s (Graf & Knoll, 2017, p. 226), it witnessed the rise of a political narrative distinguishing between political and so-called economic refugees. The federal government consequently tightened requirements for labor immigration in 1989 by introducing visa requirements for citizens of the former Eastern-Bloc states and Turkey. Later, it also implemented penalties for illegal entry and installed migration quotas (Jandl, 2008, pp. 31; 37–38).

As communist regimes collapsed and the civil war in Yugoslavia commenced, domestic concerns over immigration from the east coincided with the liberalization of border controls towards Germany and Italy. Hence, Austria engaged in re-bordering activities at its eastern borders from September 1990 onwards. In order to sustain surveillance of the borders to the former Eastern Bloc countries, Austria deployed custom officials and soldiers to assist in border management tasks. The Assistance Mission of the Federal Army for border area surveillance continued until December 2011 (Jandl, 2008).

On 1 January 1995, Austria joined the European Union. After signing the Schengen Agreement on 28 April 1995, the federal government committed to the gradual dissolution of internal border controls towards Italy starting from December 1997 and towards Germany starting from April 1998.

### **a) Adapting national frameworks to Schengen border rules**

With Austria's accession to the Schengen area, approximately 470 km of borders were transformed into EU-external borders. During this period, the government sought to adapt to the legal framework of the European Union and the Schengen acquis. Beside domestic considerations, the federal government aimed to prove towards the EU that it was "ready for Schengen," a concern primarily raised by Germany (Siebold, 2014, p. 293).

The adoption of the Schengen acquis required adaptations to the national legal and administrative framework (Wukitsch, 2018, p. 27), which can be primarily found in the Border Control Act (*Grenzkontrollgesetz* 1996), the Police Cooperation Act (*Polizeikooperationsgesetz* 1997) and the Aliens Police Act (*Fremdenpolizeigesetz* 2005). Hence, the borders towards Italy and Germany would gradually be translated into a border area as stated by the Border Control Act:

A border control area is assigned to each border checkpoint; this is the area located inland within 10 kilometers of the border crossing point (Federal Law Gazette No. 435/1996, §7).

Based on the Border Control Act of 1996, persons would only be controlled by the public security authorities

*[...] if there is reason to believe that they are subject to border control or that they intend to cross or have crossed the border without authorization outside border crossing points.* (Federal Law Gazette No. 435/1996, §12a)

The Aliens Police Act passed in 2005 created the legal framework for rejection and repatriation within the framework of border, alien, and security police controls. According to this law, foreigners may be repatriated if they had entered the federal territory illegally. Furthermore, they may be controlled throughout a period of seven days after entering. The public security authorities can and may prevent

aliens from entering or continuing their journey if they do not meet the entry requirements. The Aliens Police Act further introduced carrier liability, which extends the duty of entry control to carriers by requiring them, under threat of penalty, to ensure that the persons they carry are permitted to enter the country.

These measures underline that the dismantling of border control posts did not mean the elimination of hard borders. Rather, borders became more volatile, mobile, and diffuse (Herrmann, 2018, p. 222). They reached inwards, and the responsibility for border controls was placed in the hands of a variety of state and non-state actors.

### **b) Bi- and multilateral agreements on police cooperation**

The Police Cooperation Act of 1997 forms the basis for the intergovernmental agreements on police cooperation that regulate the intervention of the Austrian police abroad as well as that of foreign authorities on Austrian territory. These compensatory measures were part of the Schengen Agreement aiming at maintaining internal security (Pudlat, 2010, p. 11). Instead of hard border controls, several instruments and compensatory measures were installed:

- controls at the green and blue borders (land and water)
- surveillance and tracing groups
- a unit for dragnet controls throughout the country.

In 2000, the government established the Salzburg Forum, a platform for multilateral cooperation on border control. Police cooperation with neighboring states that were not yet part of the Schengen area was to guarantee a smooth transition towards joint control efforts. This was also the purpose of the Security Policy Partnership Project together with Slovenia, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, which was later joined by Slovakia (2001), Bulgaria, and Romania (2006) (Pudlat, 2014, p. 270). Both constitute efforts of the government to position itself an important security partner and expert on external border protection in the Schengen area. The Joint Declaration of July 2001 states:

Austria supports the participating accession candidates on their way to the European Union. Special attention has to be turned to acquiring full Schengen maturity as soon as possible.

and it continues:

[...] this ... requires from the participating partner countries a continuation of efforts in order to ensure a high security standard for this region (Salzburg Forum, 2001).

Police cooperation was planned on an operational level, “as well as close cooperation in their border regions” and border protection was conceptualized by joint strategy and “joint concepts for efficient border surveillance” (Salzburg Forum, 2001). The Ministers furthermore concluded Bilateral Memoranda of Understanding, which provided, among other things, for the strengthening of joint police patrols (Pudlat, 2014, p. 270). The Special Border Commission (SOKO Grenze) established in 2001 is an example of police cooperation in the border area. It consisted of police officers from Austria, Hungary, and Slovakia and was tasked with combatting human smuggling and collecting information on routes and smuggling procedures (o.A., 2001). In the Innsbruck Declaration, issued at the Salzburg Forum in 2007, the

participating states agreed to establish the Central European Operational Network (CEON), thus reinforcing the existing security partnership.

During the EU's eastward enlargement, the neighboring countries of Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia joined the Schengen Agreement on 21 December 2007 (followed by Switzerland on 12 December 2008 and Liechtenstein on 19 December 2011). The Schengen enlargement was taken as an opportunity to intensify police cooperation on trafficking, criminal activities, and irregular immigration (Federal Law Gazette III 121/2006) as compensatory measures for the upcoming dismantling of border controls (Forum Salzburg, 2007; Marakovits, 2007, p. 39; Pudlat, 2014, p. 269). The Minister of Interior at the time, Günther Platter (Austrian People's Party), referred to the concept as a "twofold safety belt" (*Doppelter Sicherheitsgürtel*) (o.A., 2007, p. 15).

Whereas the Salzburg Forum had been an initiative that was carried out mostly outside the EU framework, Austria has also engaged in border management projects within the EU. For example, it signed the Prüm Treaty in 2006 and participated in the PHARE Twinning Projects with neighboring countries ((Pudlat, 2014, p. 270). Bearing the title "Strengthening Border Management," the project provided for the establishment of police cooperation centers (among others in Thörl, Dolga Vas, Hegyeshalom-Nickelsdorf, and Mauern). The responsibilities of these centers included the establishment of joint control, observation, and investigation groups, cross-border manhunts, mixed patrols along the common state border, the use of liaison officers, cross-border observation, hot pursuit and controlled deliveries (drug trafficking, money laundering, etc.), as well as undercover investigations to solve crimes (Federal Law Gazette III 51/2005). By expanding cross-border police cooperation, member states share some of their national sovereignty, as the agreements allow police officers of neighboring states to continue a police action on the territory of the neighboring state (Federal Law Gazette III 210/2005).

### **Reinventing hard borders: 2015 to 2021**

In 2015, Austria became a reception and transit country for a large number of refugees moving into and across Europe. From September 2015 to February 2016, an average of about 131,500 refugees per month arrived in Austria (Rechnungshof, 2020, p. 8), which initially overwhelmed the reception system. Strong civil society engagement compensated for the lack of state-organized aid by providing shelter, food, and clothing. However, public sentiments soon shifted away from a welcome culture towards restrictive attitudes that would also be mirrored in asylum and border control policies (A. T. Müller & Oberprantacher, 2017, p. 226; S. Müller & Rosenberger, 2017)

Just as migration and asylum had gradually given way to other issues on the political agenda, the COVID pandemic hit the European Union in 2020, once more leading to the politicization of borders. Border controls and closures were now considered adequate policy tools to contain the spread of the virus. During this time, the government extended its border controls, introduced border closures and travel bans, and reinforced the existing police and military forces through an Assistance Mission of the Federal Army. However, to meet the demand on labor forces, it also organized a transportation, testing, and quarantine system to allow 24-hour caregivers and harvest workers into the country. The former mainly came from Romania and Slovakia, the latter from Kosovo, Ukraine, and Romania (derstandard.at, 2020; Krutzler, 2020; W. Müller & Scherndl, 2020; Scherndl, 2020).

### c) Re-bordering through intra-Schengen border controls

Both moments of crisis were accompanied by a systematic and quasi-permanent suspension of the Schengen border rules. Therefore, the government used all three options by which the Schengen Borders Code (Recital of the Schengen Border Code, 2016) allows for a temporary suspension:

- (1) Article 27 (former 24), which applies to foreseeable events and therefore plannable internal border controls, such as political or sport events;
- (2) Article 28 (former 25), which regulates the reintroduction of border controls in the event of a serious threat to public order and internal security; and
- (3) Article 29 (former 26 and 27), which regulate the (re)introduction of internal border controls in the event of serious persistent deficiencies at the external border, which constitute a serious threat to public policy, internal security, and the overall functioning of the Schengen area.
- With reference to Article 29, member states can request the European Commission to submit a recommendation on the reintroduction of internal border controls to the European Council, which can recommend these for specific member states and specific border regions. Border controls based on Article 29 can be introduced for six months and extended to a maximum of two years.

All three procedures are subject to a reporting obligation to the member states, the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European Commission (Rieder, 2016; Wukitsch, 2018, pp. 24–27).

As **Table 1** below illustrates, September 2015 marks a turning point in the handling of border controls, as they were henceforth primarily legitimized in relation to migration. From 1995 to 2015, Austria had only reintroduced border controls three times. Each time they were related to political events: The official visit of representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the World Economic Forum in 2011, and the hosting of the European Football Cup in 2008.

On 17 September 2015, Austria, following Germany, decided to reintroduce border controls at the border to Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Italy, in order to regain control of the movements of migrants who entered Austria on their transit route or as final destination (EC, 2021; Minns & Karnitschnig, 2016). Chancellor Werner Faymann declared that the Schengen Agreement on open borders was suspended temporarily. He pointed at *the failure of the EU to reach an agreement on a fair allocation of refugees and to secure its external borders threatens not just Schengen but the European project as a whole* (Minns & Karnitschnig, 2016).

The information letter issued by the Minister of the Interior to the European Union (CoE 2015, No 12110/15) stated that, due to the migration flows to and via Austria and due to the reintroduction of border controls by Germany, the security situation had prompted the government to reintroduce border controls to prevent further serious threats to public order and internal security. The minister argued that this measure had been unavoidable, given the massive influx of third-country nationals. Further, it was said that border controls contribute to the avoidance of a continuous overburdening of the police, rescue services, and public infrastructure. The Minister of the Interior stated that Austria itself was not responsible for the asylum procedures of the majority of refugees entering or passing the country, meaning that the responsible member states did not register the persons. Eventually, the minister pointed out that

the European legal framework can only function well if all member states accepted their joint responsibility in solidarity (Council of the European Union, 2015 No 12110/15).

**Table 1. Overview of internal border control events and assistance missions of the federal armed forces**

Date	Internal border control events	Federal armed force assistance missions
4.9.1991–21.12.2007		Immigration-related: at green and blue borders to Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia
22.12.2007–16.12.2011		Immigration-related: at green and blue borders to Hungary and Slovakia
2.6. 2008–1.7.2008	European Football Championship EURO 2008	
4.6. 2011–9.6.2011	World Economic Forum	
16.9.2015–11.1.2018	<b>Migration governance crisis</b>	
18.9.2015–28.12.2018		Immigration-related: Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Italy
9.7.2018–13.07.2018	Informal meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers in Innsbruck	
17.9.2018–21.9.2018	Informal meeting of the European Council in Salzburg	
12.11.2018–12.11.2019	<b>Migration issues</b>	
12.11.2019–12.5.2020	COVID-19 and migration issues	
11.3.2020–11.5.2020	COVID-19	
<b>Ongoing since 10.03.2020 (status quo: 19.11.2021)</b>		Due to COVID (at all borders) <sup>3</sup>
12.5.2020–11.11.2021	COVID-19 and migration issues	
12.11.2021–11.05.2022	Migration issues	

Sources: EC 2021; Rechnungshof 2010; 2013; 2020.

Austria has extended its internal border controls ever since. It has invoked different paragraphs of the SBC. Whereas it first invoked Article 25 (Art. 28 from 2016), relating to the event of a serious threat to public order and internal security, it later adduced Articles 23 and 24 (SBC 2013), which refer to cases of plannable border controls. Meanwhile, in accordance with the Council's Implementing Decisions, Austria extended border controls from May 2017 to May 2018, pursuant to the new Article 29 introduced to the Schengen Border Code in 2016.

The European Council repeatedly made its recommendation to reintroduce internal border controls to Denmark, Germany, Norway, Austria, and Sweden (Council of the European Union, 2016). It stated that the EU had been facing an unprecedented migration and refugee crisis, following a dramatic increase in migration flows since 2015. This crisis had further highlighted structural weaknesses in external border management and had led to failures in the reception and registration of migrants. The deficiencies of external border management, as the Council stated, had led to secondary movements, resulting in serious threats to public order or internal security in several member states. The introduction of temporary internal border controls by Denmark, Germany, Austria, Sweden, and the associated country Norway was considered necessary and appropriate by the European Council. It consequently recommended that

<sup>3</sup> See Austria Institut für Europa und Sicherheitspolitik, 2021. By November 2021, it was not clear whether the military assistance mission was related to the COVID-19 pandemic or to migration issues. Moreover, the Ministry of Defense did not report which border areas were controlled by the Federal Army.

the controls be continued, considering that persisting serious deficiencies in external border controls would jeopardize the overall functioning of the Schengen area in the absence of internal border controls (Council of the European Union, 2016).

#### **d) Unilateral re-bordering measures**

Against the background of increased immigration via the asylum system in 2015 and the COVID crisis beginning in March 2020, the government introduced a broad variety of unilateral re-bordering measures. An emergency regulation from 2016 authorized the federal government to install an upper limit (*Obergrenze*) of asylum applications, even though this measure never was enforced (Graf & Knoll, 2017, p. 230; Rutz, 2018, p. 50). The regulation was justified on account of the maintenance of public order and the protection of internal security, which, it was argued, would be endangered, should a great number of people seek asylum in Austria (Benedek, 2016, p. 955). According to legal scholar Peter Hilpold (2017, p. 311 f.), the decision to introduce an upper limit in the Asylum Act was ultimately an unconstitutional legal measure.

Beside introducing restrictions in the Asylum laws, government ordered the construction of a border fence towards Slovenia along the checkpoints Spielfeld and Bad Radkersburg in December 2015, even though it had earlier criticized Hungary for similar actions (Rechnungshof, 2020, p. 19; Rheindorf & Wodak, 2020, p. 223; Rutz, 2018, p. 46). It also communicated plans to build a border fence along the Austrian-Italian border (tirol.orf.at, 2016), but did not implement the plan due to the resistance of the Italian government, which had announced filing a complaint against Austria because of an infringement of the Schengen Agreement (Kleine Zeitung, 2016; meinbezirk.at, 2016; Mumelter, 2016). Former Chancellor Werner Faymann (Social Democratic Party) stated that this border tool could not be considered a fence:

There is a difference between building a boundary and building a door with side elements. It is not a fence around Austria. It is a technical security measure that does not encircle Austria (Faymann cited in Rheindorf & Wodak, 2020, p. 229).<sup>4</sup>

The Minister of the Interior claimed that a fence was the only tool to retain control over refugee movements. In June 2018, both the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense of the Austrian People's Party and Freedom Party coalition government organized a border guard exercise with the name "Pro Borders" in Spielfeld (Styria), which drew much media attention (Rechnungshof, 2020, p. 9). As a further initiative, the Federal Army was called into an assistance mission to regain control over irregular migratory movements in mid-September 2015. It focused on supporting border management towards dealing with migration flows but also included humanitarian aid within the country. In August 2016, the government expanded the assistance mission to include the guarding of foreign representative bodies in Vienna (terminated by the end of 2018). In August 2017, it was further extended to include large-scale controls in the interior of the country (Hense-Lintschnig, 2018; Rechnungshof, 2020, p. 7). The Ministry

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<sup>4</sup>“Es ist ein Unterschied, ob man eine Grenze baut oder ob man ein Türl baut mit Seitenteilen. Es ist kein Zaun rund um Österreich. Das ist eine technische Sicherheitsmaßnahme, die Österreich nicht einkastelt” (Bundeskanzler Faymann in ORF News 2015, cited by Rheindorf & Wodak, 2020, p. 229).

of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice agreed on stepping up policing to combat human smuggling by tightening controls in trains from Hungary, and in the immediate vicinity of the border.

The assistance mission had the objective of supporting security police forces in border control actions at border checkpoints, particularly to intercept individuals. Furthermore, the armed forces were supposed to carry out surveillance tasks in defined areas beyond border checkpoints, specifically through independent patrol activities (Rechnungshof, 2020, p. 39). The Court of Auditors has criticized that the armed forces have contributed to merely 3.5 percent of the total number of interceptions of irregular migrants from March to December 2016. In 2017, this number rose to 4.5 percent of the interception cases and totaled 1.6 percent in the first half of 2018 (Rechnungshof, 2020, p. 8).

Simultaneous to the assistance mission of the army, the Home Affairs Minister established various new police units. In January 2016, the existing police units responsible for alien and border controls were reinforced with 200 police officers (BMI 2015). In 2017, the Organizational Unit for Operational Compensation Measures was established, primarily performing dragnet controls. This includes control and search actions throughout federal territory, especially on transit routes, with the aim of combatting irregular migration, smuggling, and human trafficking. The unit consists of trained specialists in the recognition of forged or falsified documents (o.A., 2017). In 2018, the Alien and Border Police Unit Puma was installed to deal with refugee movements. It was replaced by the Unit for Investigative Techniques in 2020, which was tasked to support other organizational units with the aid of drones. This includes drone operations to combat human smuggling, carried out in the border area (o.A., 2018). The established police units compensate for the dismantling of border controls by carrying out investigative, border, and alien police controls in the interior of the country through so-called dragnet controls (o.A., 2018).

#### **e) Re-bordering through externalization**

During 2015–2021, Austria continued its engagement in bi- and multilateral agreements concerning border policies. In 2015, Austria agreed with Hungary on cooperation in dealing with cross-border trafficking in the event of the reintroduction of border controls. Furthermore, Hungary and Austria agreed on strengthening their cooperation to combat cross-border crime and irregular migration. They thus wished to ensure the maintenance of public security and order. Additionally, cooperation with the alien police force was to be increased, for example through joint police patrols (Federal Gazette III 165/2018).

Likewise, bi- and trilateral police cooperation with the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary was reinforced to fight human smuggling, cross-border crime, and irregular migration (BMI & BK, 2015, p. 10). Beyond that, the Ministry of the Interior has continued its efforts towards bilateral agreements on police cooperation with the Czech Republic, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and Liechtenstein (cf. Federal Gazette III 47/2017; 55/2016). These agreements contain joint measures for cross-border surveillance and hot pursuit, cooperation in cases of controlled delivery, the provision of liaison officers, joint policing centers, assistance in controlling irregular immigration, joint repatriation efforts, and mutual surrendering of persons at the border. Furthermore, the agreement with Germany includes assistance towards the implementation of measures in the event of the temporary reintroduction of border controls (cf. Federal Gazette III 18/2018).

In the past, Austria had already engaged in joint operations on the international level and within the EU framework. As a result, the Joint Operational Office against human smuggling and trafficking (JOO) was installed in Vienna in May 2016. It serves as an operational platform for international investigations into migrant smuggling along the Western Balkan and Central Mediterranean route (APA 2017). In addition, the JOO is responsible for reporting on illegal migration movements and trafficking routes (Europol, 2016).

Another such initiative was the Joint Action Days (JAD), which was defined as “cross-border law enforcement action days focusing on horizontal key crime hot spots and criminal infrastructures across the EU” (General Secretariat of the Council, 2016). In 2019 and 2020, the JAD Danube, under Austrian leadership with the support of FRONTEX, was supposed to combat migrant smuggling in the Western Balkan region and within the EU. Countries from the EU and all Balkan states participated (FRONTEX, 2019).

The rhetoric of the closure of the Western Balkan Route was a key political issue that emerged from the crisis of migration governance in 2015. At the Western Balkan Conference on 24 February 2016, titled *Managing Migration Together*, Austria joined forces with government officials from Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The agreement contained closely coordinated measures in order to manage migration movements efficiently in line with international and European law, specifically concerning the Schengen Borders Code and particularly addressing border management (Dzihic, 2019, pp. 9–10). The member states of the EU offered mutual support for efficient border management in the Balkan region. The agreement furthermore provides for closer police cooperation among the Western Balkan states. The common aim was to reduce the number of migrants in the region significantly (BMI & BMEIA, 2016). This marks a new form of European border politics, which externalized the responsibility of EU border controls to non-EU countries. The special situation in the Western Balkans was that all countries were either EU candidates or were aiming at becoming such. Sanja Milivojevic (2019, p. 65), a scholar on border control in the Balkans, consequently states:

Potential and candidate states in the region have been pressured to harmonize their legislation, policies, and practices with the EU, and to “do border” on its behalf. Through the implementation of requirements set in the EU policy framework, future members have to demonstrate both the capacity and the willingness to become a new frontier of the EU’s border regime. These “genuine partnerships” are, however, a simple transfer of the mechanisms of border control to potential and candidate states.

The EU-Turkey Deal enacted on 18 March 2016 has been argued a more efficient instrument to decrease the number of refugees entering the Balkan area and the European Union significantly (Dzihic, 2019, p. 10; Graf & Knoll, 2017, p. 230; North, 2017). Nonetheless, the narrative of the closure of the Western Balkan route continued to exist in Austrian domestic politics. Particularly chancellor Sebastian Kurz repeatedly visited countries such as Serbia and North Macedonia, where he argued that “the closure of the Western Balkan route shows that migration flows can be actively influenced” (krone.at, 2017).

In 2020, the ministers of the countries of the Salzburg Forum, the Western Balkans, Denmark, Greece, and Germany, as well as representatives of the European Commission, EASO, FRONTEX, and the Director General of the ICMPD issued the Vienna Declaration on effectively combatting irregular migration along the Eastern Mediterranean Route at a renewed West Balkan Conference (Vienna



Declaration, 2020). The Austrian Minister of the Interior postulated that reopening the borders in the context of the COVID pandemic would mean opening borders for irregular migration and human smuggling. The Vienna Declaration (2020) states:

... [i]rregular border crossing will not be tolerated. Likewise, encouraging migrants to endanger their lives by attempting irregular border crossing by land or sea is not acceptable. These messages should be relayed.

The aim of the conference was to establish a three-stage security network for Austria. The first stage included securing the external EU border. Austria therefore sent armored vehicles and Cobra police-unit forces to Greece. The second stage included securing the borders in the Western Balkan region as well as the external EU borders of Croatia, Slovenia, and Hungary. The third stage pertained to a security network running along the Austrian border and in the interior of the country (o.A., 2020).

The Vienna Declaration proposed a holistic approach towards combatting irregular migration and human smuggling by coordinating and harmonizing the approaches to border protection, repatriation, asylum, and combatting smuggling. To this end, bilateral and multilateral agreements were made with non-EU countries along the Eastern Mediterranean Route. In addition, an Operational Platform – Eastern Mediterranean Route was established in Vienna. Its main focus was coordination, cooperation, and communication between all involved states and organisations (o.A., 2020; Vienna Declaration, 2020).

#### **f) Intensified re-bordering: the COVID-19 pandemic**

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit Austria in March 2020, internal border controls were reintroduced along the borders to all neighboring countries. Furthermore, cross-border traffic was suspended, starting with the borders to Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, and Hungary. This was extended to all neighboring countries and lasted until May 2020. The information letter to the EU concerning the temporary reintroduction of border controls at the Austrian internal borders in accordance with Article 284F of Schengen Borders Code states that the cause for the border controls is the increase of COVID cases across Europe. As a result, all available measures would be taken to avoid a further spread of the Corona virus, which was qualified as a serious threat to public security as defined in the Schengen Borders Code.

As early as May 2020, the government justified the prolongation of border controls with the migration issue once more. In the information letter to the EU, the Minister of the Interior, Karl Nehammer (Austria People's Party), declared:

Due to the continuing high migration pressure and the continuing volatile migration situation on various routes and within the EU, as well as the increasing activity of human trafficking, the Austrian Federal Government concludes that the situation is still not sufficiently stable (Council of the European Union, 2020).

The minister also pointed out that Turkey had attempted to blackmail the EU and that an increase in migratory pressure could therefore be expected once the COVID-19 situation had subsided. He argued that the measures to combat the COVID-19 crisis (above all border closures) had caused migrants to become stranded in the states of the Western Balkans. Therefore, it had to be assumed that migration

pressure would increase when the situation eased and the borders re-opened. He further emphasized that a continued shortcoming in external border protection could lead to a criminal and terrorist threat (Council of the European Union, 2020).

In the spring of 2020, the Ministry of Health issued a landing ban on aircrafts from COVID-19 risk areas between 13 April and 15 July 2020 (Federal Law Gazette II No. 83/2020 and No. 319/2020). Likewise, rail traffic from Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Italy was suspended between 13 April and 14 June 2020 (Federal Law Gazette II No. 86/2020 and No. 196/2020). Furthermore, the entry regulations to Austria were supplemented by the requirement of health certificates (Federal Law Gazette II No. 80/2020, No. 89/2020, and No. 263/2020).

In 2020, an average of around 1,100 soldiers per day assisted the police forces as an assistance mission of the Federal Army. An average of 286 soldiers were on duty at the border in support of the police forces and health authorities. Members of the militia were conscripted additionally. On behalf of the health authorities, the Armed Forces were designated to check health-related entry regulations together with the police at the border (Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung, 2020). In February 2020, the Command Support Battalion and parts of the Air Force were deployed to assist in border surveillance and health-related border controls in Tyrol (Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung, 2021). In May 2020, almost 1,400 soldiers were deployed for the COVID-19 assistance mission, but not all were located at the borders. A month later, about 800 soldiers supported the Security Police Assistance Mission, which had been installed in 2015 for the purpose of Austrian border management. The Minister of the Interior argued that the imminent opening of EU- borders would increase migratory pressure. The remaining fighter companies would therefore serve in the migration mission at the Schengen border as well as in the Anti-COVID-19 mission at the border to Italy ((Bundesministerium Inneres, 2020). The Security Police Assistance Mission was still in force in 2021, as was the extension of the internal border controls.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented key developments of Austrian border politics and policies, beginning with the country's accession to the European Union and its participation in the Schengen area in the mid-1990s. By differentiating two phases, we provided evidence that from 1995 until 2014, the national adaption to the Schengen acquis implied selective de-bordering towards Germany and Italy, and later towards the eastern neighboring countries. However, initial de-bordering measures towards western neighbor states were accompanied by fortification measures toward the east as well as compensatory measures, including dragnet controls of aliens and crime policing in selected border areas. Border control measures included the involvement of the federal armed forces along border hinterlands as well as the relocation of immigration-related policing activities along routes where suspicious individuals could be expected. The high expenditure of personnel and resources for border control along the former external borders can be considered an act of European integration, through which Austria wanted to prove that it was ready for Schengen. Evidently, integration into the Schengen area did not merely imply de-bordering but rather suggested new concepts of bordering, which were geographically partly detached from national territorial borderlines. After 2007, when the new EU member states had successfully implemented the Schengen acquis, bordering efforts were further externalized to the Western Balkans countries.

As from 2015, we can observe two key developments. On the one hand, externalization measures through bi- and multilateral agreements and cooperation continue to play an important role in Austrian border politics. This became particularly evident in the context of the dominant narrative of “closing the Western Balkans route”. The Austrian government, especially under exterior minister and later chancellor Sebastian Kurz, played a key role in politicizing the region as the new European borderland. Diplomatic ties with Serbia and North-Macedonia, for example, were strengthened in order to intensify cooperation in border controlling.

On the other hand, the increased application of national measures, such as restrictive asylum and immigration laws, the building of a fence, and the assistance missions of the Federal Army indicate that the crisis had induced shocks which have shaken the trust between EU member states. The return of the hard border can be considered both as a set of concrete policy tools that has effectively increased national capacities for control, interception, and rejection, and as an attempt to restore the symbolic authority of the government over apparent migration-related challenges. The policy to set an upper limit for asylum applications can be interpreted as the deterioration of human rights and a discursive move, “resemiotizing the politics of delimiting and policing the national body” (see Rheindorf & Wodak, 2020, p. 34).

The second crisis followed in 2020, when COVID began to spread across Europe. Throughout the pandemic, Austria’s government had reinforced border controls and issued travel bans, quarantine regulations, and health checks. This led to a new approach toward borders, considering that permission to enter federal territory was linked to proof of sound health. These measures represent a completely novel approach. For the first time, they applied to all European and national citizens. Interestingly, one can also observe measures of immigration mobilization for particular groups. Due to a supply crisis of 24-hour care workers and seasonal harvesters, government decided to actively organize and facilitate the journey and accommodation of labor forces from Eastern Europe (derstandard.at, 2020; W. Müller & Scherndl, 2020; Norbert Lehmann, 2020; Scherndl, 2020; wien.orf.at, 2020).

These two crises have led to the erosion of the Schengen measures. Intra-Schengen border controls that had previously neither been considered as a tool of immigration control for asylum-seekers nor as a means of fighting pandemics have recently taken on a new meaning. While unilateral bordering and the return of the hard border may create the impression that states are regaining sovereignty, these measures potentially foil solidarity and coordinated action within the European Union, acting as makeshifts for durable solutions such as distribution schemes for asylum-seekers or harmonized rules for mobility during pandemics.

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## Chapter 3

### **United in bordering, divided in solidarity: (re)bordering practices in and *à la carte*/flexible solidarity towards Greece in the post-2014 migration management**

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#### **Introduction**

The response of the EU to the post-2014 so-called migrant ‘crisis’ has been based on two strands of narratives, the security narrative and the humanitarianism narrative. The first narrative focuses on the need to safeguard the external borders of the EU and the security of EU citizens from an external threat. The solutions offered are based on more EU integration in parallel with further involvement of the Union in fortifying its external borders. Opposite to the sovereign logic is the humanitarianism narrative. The latter emphasizes the humanitarian dimension of the EU project in its duty to rescue migrants (see Introduction). The two narratives co-exist, albeit clashing with each other, together with other EU foreign policy narratives, in order to reassure self-identity.

Despite early debates on what EU policy responses should be, post-2014 migration governance at the EU level has been viewed mainly as a security issue and thus has revolved around the ideas of deterrence of irregular migration and protection of the EU external borders, rather than focusing on humanitarianism and development of integration policies for migrants. This is not a departure from previous more humanitarian policies, as the ‘foundational’ EU narrative would argue, but rather a move in practice towards cementing a more integrated security process against irregular migration inside the EU borders. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum is an example of that. Nonetheless, in the process of prioritizing the safeguarding of its internal market and liberal democracy by securitizing its external borders, the EU creates ontological insecurities to frontline EU members as to the impact that their membership has on the extent of control they have over their own borders and the degree and manner of solidarity expected by other member states.

The increase in the influx of migrants arriving to Greece throughout 2015 and the rising numbers of deaths in the sea during the same period, placed the country at the epicenter of the post-2014 ‘migrant crisis’ and the events that followed, leading up to the EU-Turkey Statement signed in March 2016 (European Council, 2016), a diplomatic move that officially sealed the so-called Balkan corridor. The flows of irregular migrants originated from the wider area of North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. Flows of migrants from this particular wave were evident in the Mediterranean region as early as 2011, but it was the escalation of the Syrian civil war in 2012–2013, rooted in social uprisings, part of the Arab Spring movement, as well as the rise of Islamic groups in 2013–2014, that generated massive influx of migrants to Europe. Figures taken from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) showcase that at the peak of the ‘migrant crisis’ in 2015, out of the 1,032,408 people who crossed the Mediterranean, 861,630 people did so through Greece (UNHCR Mediterranean, 2022).

The Greek experience of the EU border ‘crises’ is of particular interest as the country played, and continues to play, a central role in the securitization narratives of defending, and sometimes, failing to



defend, the Union's internal mobility and external borders. The so-called migrant 'crisis' came as the latest one in a series of 'crises' where Greece was severely affected. The notion of solidarity has featured prominently in the national narratives of the dominant parties in power since 2014 (SYRIZA-ANEL and New Democracy) in order to express the ontological (in)securities of Greece as an EU member state on the borders of the Union, as well as make sense of the country's borders, both national and EU, in the new borderlands (see Introduction chapter). By using the new borderlands in the south EU periphery for the management of the migrant 'crisis,' the EU attempted to "delocalize, externalize, outsource, off-shore, stretch, export, and/or expand far beyond its own external borders" (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2017, p. 4).

This chapter examines three occasions where Greek borders acquired a different meaning in relation to its EU membership within the framework of the migrant 'crisis.' The closing of the border with North Macedonia assisted by other EU members, where the area of the Western Balkans was utilized as a buffer zone, limited Greece's access to the Schengen zone and transformed it into a buffer state; the EU-Turkey agreement, which bound Greece and Turkey into a buffer area of outsourcing migration management and thus expanded the EU influence beyond its physical borders; and the New Pact on Asylum and Immigration, which cements the fluidity of EU borders outside EU territory by de-territorializing EU borders and transforming them into non-territories. Throughout these stages solidarity towards Greece as a frontline EU member state takes the very specific form of support towards enhanced deterrence of irregular migration into the EU and *à la carte*/flexible solidarity.

### **The EU framework**

Inside the EU policy framework migration has always been perceived as a secondary issue for concern linked to security (Ceccorulli & Lucarelli, 2017). For example, although the topic of migration is not framed nor discussed as a security threat in the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) (European Union External Action, 2016) or in any previous EU migration related document, like the European Security Strategy of 2003 (Council of the European Union, 2003), in the EUGS, migration is most frequently discussed in reference to "foreign policy objectives (including internal repercussions), geographical areas and the purported values of the European Union" (Ceccorulli & Lucarelli, 2017, p. 84).

Due to its multi-governance system, i.e., combining supranational with state-level policymaking, the EU lacks an effective common policy. The EU migration governance is the result of the interaction among a plethora of different actors including EU institutions, EU member states, states belonging to the Schengen zone and nonstate actors (D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019). There are several legal frameworks in the EU regulating the right to entry, stay, mobility, access to labor and welfare, including the Schengen Agreement, the Dublin Regulation, and the EU's Visa Regulation.

The paradox of an applied common European immigration and asylum policy lies in the fact that although under the Treaties the EU is competent to develop a common procedure, EU level provisions remain only complimentary to state level immigration law, as EU member states retain the right to adopt only the more favorable regulations to their national interests, as well as to control the volumes of admissions of third country nationals (Strumia, 2016). In essence, supranational cooperation among EU member states in the context of the EU common immigration policy is presented, in the words of Strumia (2016, p. 11), "as a sort of anomalous federalism," i.e., although there is a commitment by all EU member states to share

responsibilities and protect fundamental human rights, the fact that ultimate decisionmaking and policy formation lie with the state, offers member states the liberty of pursuing their national interests as opposed to the collective interest of the Union, avoid amendments to preexisting national immigration laws, and exhibit intrastate solidarity only selectively. The strain on the Dublin system and the lack of consistency in a common EU response created tensions among member states, some viewing EU's policies as detrimental to their national interests (for example the Visegrad states) and others being accused of not being able to comply with the principles of protecting the internal borders of the EU (for example Greece and Italy), resulting in a lack of solidarity among member states, as well as notable violations of human rights against the fundamental principles represented by the EU as a normative power (Fassi, 2017).

### **An entrance to Europe**

Greece has been at the forefront of the 'migrant crisis,' as one of the main migratory routes to the EU. The Greek handling of the 'crisis' has been conducted within the framework of the EU policies and responses, but also in relation to the pre-existing 'crises,' by which Greece was profoundly affected. Before the peak of the 'migrant crisis' in 2014–2015, the country had already been in a spiraling state of political, economic, and social crisis since the agreement of the First Economic Adjustment Program for Greece, or otherwise known as the first MoU signed among the Greek Government, the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2010 amidst speculations of a possible Grexit. The 2008 global economic recession, which later triggered the Eurozone crisis, impacted heavily on the Greek economy mainly due to its inherent structural weaknesses, chronic issues linked to tax evasion, political corruption and a lack of proper implementation of the necessary reforms in order to comply with the Maastricht criteria (Gkasis, 2018). As a result, the country was faced with a threefold crisis in its economy; a balance of payments crisis, a debt crisis, and a banking crisis (Tsoukalis, 2012). The austerity measures that were adopted in order to make the economy more competitive had little effect as government debt rose to record levels (more than 179 percent of the 2016 GDP), while exports of goods and services as a percentage of GDP rose only slightly in the period between 2010–2013 (Gkasis, 2018).

Politics in Greece were also profoundly affected by the economic crisis and social backlash against successive austerity measures adopted. In the period between 2010–2015 four parliamentary elections took place in the country (in May 2012, June 2012, January 2015, and September 2015), three caretaker governments were formed (in November 2011, May 2012, and August 2015) and a national referendum on the latest package of austerity measures was conducted (July 2015). The consecutive elections revealed the disintegration of the political landscape and the rise of fringe parties, including radical left SYRIZA, which came to power in coalition with far-right ANEL in January 2015 based on its anti-austerity and renegotiating Greece-EU relations rhetoric (Papadimitriou et al., 2019).

Part of the narrative was also the determination to replace any closed centers with open ones, speed up the asylum procedure, support family reunification, and protect migrants' human rights (Stivas, 2021). Following the result of the referendum and the dramatic turn of the SYRIZA-ANEL government to accept a harsher package of austerity measures under the pressure of a strained economy due to capital controls, Greece found itself in a new round of parliamentary elections in September 2015, which on the one hand confirmed the people's support for populist and radical parties, while on the other hand it

revealed political apathy due to high levels of abstention, demonstrating “the ill health of both the Greek and EU status quo and of representative democracy at large” (Prodromidou, 2018, p. 197). In all, the peak of the ‘migrant crisis’ in 2015 found Greece in a continuing state of crisis politically, economically, and socially, and the country’s population susceptible to both populist and non-populist narratives questioning the EU’s validity as a union of stability and solidarity. It was during this time that narratives about solidarity, or lack thereof, became very prominent among the Eurozone member states in the EU periphery. These narratives were subsequently transferred to discourses about the migrant ‘crisis’ reinforcing frontline states’ insecurity as EU members.

The relationship between the previous ‘crises’ and the migrant ‘crisis’ narrative came into play in the SYRIZA-ANEL government’s narrative, as according to Tsourapas and Zartaloudis (2022), the fact that Greece was a first-entry country was used as a leverage in the negotiations on the review of the country’s Second Economic Adjustment Program. The rhetoric included the urgency to salvage the Greek state from default or a possible *Grexit* in order to safeguard the rest of the EU from irregular migrants swarming in (Tsourapas & Zartaloudis, 2022). The general anti-EU rhetoric was expressed by focusing on the domestic handling of the ‘crisis’ despite the failure of the EU to provide solidarity and adhere to the protection of human rights (Dimitriadi & Sarantaki, 2018), as well as opposing stricter border controls based on the premise of humanitarianism. The government had been quite vocal in its position that the issue of the increased influx of irregular migrants was a question of humanitarian crisis and a matter of solidarity that should be of concern at the EU level, rather than just the national level. The official stance of SYRIZA was reinforced by some party members advocating in favor of ‘open borders.’ Although this was later contradicted by the official party, it was still perceived by many to be a clear message to irregular migrants that they could enter Greece and transit the country on their way to the north and west of Europe unencumbered. Likewise, the junior government far-right party of ANEL supported the same rhetoric of the gatekeeper, albeit from another more securitized standpoint. The leader of ANEL, Panos Kammenos, for example, stated, “we cannot keep ISIS out if EU keeps bullying us” (Carassava & Aldrick, 2015).

During this period, the Greek government consciously equated Greece’s material borders with those of the EU in order to alleviate the importance of Greece as a host country and a gatekeeper. In November 2015, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras stated in a national TV speech:

The refugee matter is an issue of huge proportions. No country can deal with it on its own. Greece, on the borders of Europe, gives its own battle in defense of human values and solidarity. While the voices of isolationists and xenophobics grow around us, the Greek people, despite facing deep economic and social crises, teach humanism and empathy (Hellenic Republic Prime Minister, 2015).

### **Leading up to the EU-Turkey Agreement**

Amidst acute accusations directed toward the lack of a concrete response by the EU, linked to the Mediterranean death toll rising to 3,771 in summer 2015 (UNHCR Mediterranean, 2022), Angela Merkel proclaimed in August 2015 that Germany would welcome all Syrian refugees (Dockery, 2017), this way suspending in her country for the first time one of the pillars of EU immigration policies, the Dublin Regulation. Although the intention of promoting an ‘open border’ policy was later highly disputed by the German government, the general perception was that this was an open invitation to all migrants to seek

residence in Germany. The sudden surge in the number of migrants, already evident since 2011 (Collett, 2011) confirmed earlier fears about the effectiveness of the EU border regime and the deep divide among EU member states over a common EU migration policy, highlighting the question of burden sharing and solidarity (Dimitriadi & Sarantaki, 2018). The initial stance taken by Merkel was gradually abandoned under pressure both domestically and at the EU level (Keridis, 2018). At the same time, many EU countries, notably Austria alongside the Visegrad states, decided to unilaterally close their borders in order to stop the flows of irregular migrants from reaching their territories. Central to this decision was the fact that Schengen zone safeguarding was compromised. Being fundamental to the idea of an integrated single EU market where the mobility of people is one of four pillars, the zone is based on the agreement of sovereign states to “abolish their internal borders, for the free and unrestricted movement of people, in harmony with common rules for controlling external borders and fighting criminality by strengthening the common judicial system and police cooperation” (European Commission, 2020). Austria’s Interior Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner stated: “If we cannot protect the external EU border, the Greek-Turkish border, then the Schengen external border will move toward central Europe” (Baczynska & Körkemeier, 2016).

In the same spirit of rematerializing internal borders and beyond, i.e., threatening to exclude a Schengen accord member like Greece from the zone, the Swedish Interior Minister Anders Ygeman said: “In the end, if a country does not live up to its obligations, we will have to restrict its connections to the Schengen area” (Baczynska & Körkemeier, 2016).

The closure of the border between Greece and North Macedonia on 8 March 2016 was the result of a cumulation of successive border closures which began in October 2015 after the EU Meeting on the western Balkans Migration Route held in Brussels on 25 October 2015 (European Commission, 2015), where two main points were highlighted in relation to the management of the flows of migrants via the Balkan Route. First, the states would assist in the return of individuals not in need of international protection, stop facilitating the crossing of the corridor and to enhance cooperation in matters pertaining to policing and exchange of information. Second, the EU would reach an agreement with Turkey on managing returns. The closure of the border was the first step in the progressive closure of the Balkan Corridor and the creation of a borderland in southeast EU, including non-EU Western Balkan states and Turkey. Apart from the size of this buffer zone, the novice element in this approach was that apart from fortifying external borders and buffer zones, some of the EU member states themselves also turned into buffers (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2017). Greece was one of these member states, which witnessed this transformation, i.e., experiencing border restrictions both internally and externally.

The EU-Turkey Statement was issued on 18 March 2015 and it included the following points in relation to the fortification of the EU borders: 1) as of 20 March 2015 all irregular immigrants crossing from Turkey to Greece will be returned to Turkey in full accordance with EU and international law, while asylum-seekers will be registered in Greece; 2) for every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU, while EU members states will honor their commitment of offering a specific number of places for resettlement after which point, places will be offered voluntarily; 3) Turkey will take all necessary measures to prevent any crossings from land or sea to the EU in cooperation with the EU and neighboring states; 4) a Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme will be activated after the number of irregular crossings decreases (European Council, 2016). In return, the EU would accelerate visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, allocate 3 billion euros to Turkey

in assistance and ensure funding of future migration related schemes up to another €3 billion, to upgrade the Customs Union, to restart Turkey's accession to the EU, and finally the commitment to collaborate with Turkey on any future development projects on Syria (European Council, 2016).

The EU-Turkey statement, albeit receiving severe criticism, mainly linked to the fact that it labelled Turkey as a safe country (Dimitriadi, 2016) and the friction between the EU and Turkey over the visa liberalization, as well as questions about the actual capacity of the Greek state to process the growing numbers of asylum applications, it became the second step in securing the closure of the Balkan corridor and it added Turkey to its southeast European buffer zone. The Statement in essence linked Greece and Turkey into a common area of outsourcing EU migration management. Furthermore, the EU increased its capacity building in the Western Balkans during the first stage of the closing of the Balkan Corridor and additionally expanded its buffer zone to the east with the EU-Afghanistan readmission agreement, which allows EU members to deport unlimited numbers of Afghan asylum-seekers to their home country (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2017). The EU-Turkey Statement also turned Greece from a transit into a host country. The table below shows a steep increase in asylum applications from 2016 onwards, up until the COVID pandemic, where a dramatic decrease in the numbers of applicants took place linked to closed borders and lockdowns globally.

**Table 3. Applications for International Protection per year**

Years	Applications for International Protection <sup>2</sup>
2013	4.814
2014	9.431
2015	13.187
2016	51.044
2017	58.634
2018	66.952
2019	77.279
2020	40.553
2021	20.309
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>342.203</b>

*Source: Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum*

Once the EU-Turkey Statement went into force after March 2015, the SYRIZA-ANEL government changed its rhetoric and practice, from harsh criticism and using the geostrategic position of the country as a bargaining chip for negotiations on Greece's debt payments, to implementing the agreed policies (Tsourapas & Zartaloudis, 2022) albeit remaining a critic of EU's securitization policies as yet another example of a lack of solidarity by EU member states towards a fellow member 'state in crisis' (Dimitriadi & Sarantaki, 2018, p. 24) rather than an act of unison demonstrating solidarity in practice.

### **A New Migration Pact**

In 2019 the government in Greece changed and New Democracy, a center Right conservative party came to power. New Democracy's border narrative continued in the same line as per SYRIZA-ANEL's rhetoric

on equating the Greek material borders with those of the EU and highlighting the need for solidarity towards the country by other EU member states. In the words of the Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis:

Greece will do its part in order to speed up returns [of migrants] to Turkey and guarantee humane living standards to anyone that will remain in our country [...] We have already taken measures for the decongestion of islands, but Europe needs to protect the Greek borders, as they are also European borders, by making sure that there is a fair distribution of refugees among all member states (“Μητσοτάκης σε Ρούτε,” 2019).

What was novice in both the rhetoric and practices of the New Democracy government was the securitization of the migrant ‘crisis.’ Some days after the election results were finalized, the Ministry of Migration was merged with the Ministry for Citizen Protection, which oversees public order (Lefkofridi & Chatzopoulou, 2019). Although the move was later reversed, this was a first clear indication of securitization. In October 2019 Kyriakos Mitsotakis unveiled a four-point plan on migration. This included speeding up the asylum process, improving the coordination among the different departments of public administration involved in the management of migration, facilitating decongestion of the islands, and strengthening border controls (Bourdaras, 2019). The last point was also a departure from the SYRIZA-ANEL rhetoric towards further securitization of migration governance.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic heavily influenced migration trends and migration management worldwide. Greece was no exception. From decreasing the flow of migrants due to rolling lockdowns, to having living conditions altered, including remaining in closed or open detention centers (Dimitriadi, 2020a), to delays in asylum application procedures and reports of inhumane conditions in the detention centers and the Greek-Turkish border crisis in early 2020 (Enria & Gerwens, 2020). A New Migration Pact was deemed necessary in order to revisit the migration management of the post-COVID 19 EU environment (Dimitriadi, 2020a).

The New Migration Pact, signed on 23 September 2020, is based on two pillars: strengthening of border controls and the notion of flexible solidarity. Strengthening of border controls, a staple demand since the start of the migrant ‘crisis’ by the majority of EU member states, gained further support after the Greek-Turkish border crisis in March 2020. In late February 2020, while the COVID pandemic was gathering pace and just before the first round of lockdowns in mid to late March, Turkey announced that it would open the borders for irregular migrants to cross over to Greece, this way bridging the EU-Turkey Statement by which they were tasked with the safekeeping of these same borders (Enria & Gerwens, 2020). The specific move caused a series of violent incidents involving police tear gassing. The two-month border crisis gradually sizzled out amidst COVID-19 related lockdowns and border closures. Speaking about the Greece-Turkey border crisis, the President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen likened the EU’s borders with those of Greece: “This border is not only a Greek border; it is also a European border ... I thank Greece for being our European *aspida* [shield] in these times” (Rankin, 2020).

The Pact included the strengthening of the role of FRONTEX by increasing its budget to €9.4 billion for the period 2021–2027 and an agreement for financial support to third countries in the framework of cooperating with them on returns (Dimitriadi, 2020a). More crucially, there was agreement on returns and readmissions, as well as on the concept of flexible solidarity. The Pact introduces a system of pre-entry screenings and accelerated border procedures based on nationality for the groups of people who have the statistical possibility for recognition by EU member states of less than 20 percent as

individuals in need of international protection (Dimitriadi, 2020b). The pre-screenings take place on border or pre-border areas and the individuals going through the process are not considered as having entered EU soil. In this respect asylum-seeking does not automatically guarantee entry and stay in the EU country where the application is processed. In the meantime, applicants need to stay in designated areas, i.e., detention sites, until a decision is made on their applications. For asylum-seekers who are more likely to receive asylum, the regular process is followed. The areas framed as ‘transit zones’ or ‘non-territory’ by EU member states reduce legal responsibility and avoid bridging conditional and international law when it comes to human rights leading to de-territorialization of EU borders (Carrera, 2021).

Finally, the New Migration Pact introduces the concept of flexible solidarity, i.e., at times where regular circumstances apply, an EU member state can show solidarity towards a frontline state by choosing one of the following routes: relocation, sponsoring a return, or offering operational support or capacity building on asylum procedures to a fellow EU member state (Dimitriadi, 2020b). This is labelled as flexible but mandatory solidarity. While in times of crisis, i.e., a *force majeure*, solidarity is deemed as mandatory but inflexible, meaning that EU member states need to take part in relocation schemes for the purposes of asylum or return (Dimitriadi, 2020b). In essence, under regular circumstances, the weight of migration management falls on the shoulders of frontline states and other non-EU countries, part of the EU buffer zone, while other EU member states have the option of *à la carte*/flexible solidarity.

In practice, as it is evident in **Table 2** below, in the first months after the agreement on the New Migration Pact, EU member states opted for capacity building and sponsored returns, rather than relocations, showcasing that current migration policy is built to fortify external borders and deter irregular migration, while offering flexibility to non-frontline or buffer states in sharing the burden of migration management.

**Table 2. Returns-Departures**

	Forced <sup>1</sup>	Voluntary <sup>1</sup>	IOM <sup>1</sup>	Relocation of Unaccompanied Minors <sup>2</sup>	Dublin Transfers <sup>2</sup>	Relocations of Asylum seekers <sup>2</sup>	Relocations of Beneficiaries of International Protection <sup>2</sup>	Total
Jan-21	234	55	185	13	19		44	550
Feb-21	220	45	363	6	5	59	440	1.138
Mar-21	260	42	181	110	23	62	708	1.386
Apr-21	223	51	203	64	272	61	103	977
May-21	342	78	127	39	248	48	0	882
Jun-21	311	56	215	49	397	24	7	1.059
Jul-21	346	96	219	26	365	49	20	1.121
Aug-21	243	96	237	42	109	0	5	732
Sep-21	337	70	225	80	213	22	101	1.048
Total 9-months	2.516	589	1.955	429	1.651	325	1.428	8.893

Source: Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum

## Conclusion

In its quest for security and the protection of its internal market and liberal democracy, the EU both imposes, removes, rematerializes, and de-territorializes borders, creates legal obstacles and opacity, and enforces security measures beyond its formal physical borders. Solidarity, in the case of migration

expressed as burden-sharing, has been a central point of contention among member states in this process of securitization via (re)bordering, revealing deep divides in how it is conceived by different countries. The concept of flexible solidarity came as a remedy to reconcile opposite sides, giving the option of relocation, returns, and capacity-building to member states. Although crystalized in policy only recently with the discussions on the New Migration Pact, there is an obvious thread of policies followed towards this direction, with a clear preference by the majority of EU member states towards assisting capacity building rather than receiving refugees in their own territories.

Frontline states naturally find themselves central to this process of (re)bordering, exposed to the impact of ontological insecurity. Greece's experience varies from the ideational physical merging of its national borders with those of the EU, to being an external border to Schengen, to becoming part, together with Turkey, of a common ground of a buffer zone for outsourced migration management, and finally to stretching the ideational borders of the EU beyond its actual boundaries into the new borderlands and creating legal opacity through de-territorialization. All the while Greece suffers material border turmoil with neighboring countries, such as Turkey and North Macedonia, with whom long standing disputes preexist, non-frontline EU states not only retain, but also fortify their physical and ideational border security through *à la carte*/flexible solidarity. Inevitably, questioning the normative power of the EU both for what it stands for, but also for what its gravitational power can cause in its near vicinity when in search of security.

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## Chapter 4

### Readmission or Desecuritization?

# The Recent Migration Crisis and Bordering Narratives and Practices in Turkey

*Başak Alpan*

## Introduction

During the launching ceremony of European Border and Coast Guard on 6 October 2016 at the Bulgarian-Turkish border, guarded by a metal fence and razor wire, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov who hosted the event said: “From two years now, we have insisted that the external borders of Europe should be closed. Not the Bulgarian-Turkish border, not the Greek-Turkish border, not the Italian border. All borders. Because if we create the illusion that we have secured the border here, they [the migrants] will cross to Finland” (Gotev, 2016). This statement reflected the spirit which became prevalent in EU states after the summer of 2015, reifying not only the European framing of the “migration” and/or “asylum crisis” but also the conviction that EU’s “crisis response” had to do with borders and border management.

The 2015 crisis led to, among other policy responses crafted by Brussels, the Joint Turkey-EU Action Plan activated on 29 November 2015 which aimed to bring order to migratory flows, to control the influx of irregular migrants and to pool €3 billion of additional resources (European Commission, 2015) and the EU-Turkey Deal on 16 March 2016, which made Turkey “accept the return of all Syrian refugees who have illegally entered Greece if, in return, the EU takes up to 72,000 registered Syrian refugees off Turkey’s hands” (Bendiek, 2017, p. 21). Indeed, the refugee crisis has created a new South-eastern EU fortified borderland, in which the Balkan region and Turkey are now a large buffer zone made of fortified states (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2017, p. 59).

This research aims to understand the recent developments regarding the latest “migration crisis”<sup>1</sup> by focusing on how the influx of Syrian refugees has been framed in Turkish political scene. The central argument will be that the migration crisis was desecuritized both at narrative and practice levels, seeing the reception of the Syrian refugees as a “moral” and “ethical” move. The main reason for the lack of a discursive securitization of the “migration crisis,” as will be elaborated below, is that Syrian refugees were never seen as a threat to the “ontological security” of the Turkish state and Turkish citizens, as it has frequently been the case in most of the EU member states. Nevertheless, this position has turned into a securitization of the crisis at the practice level following the rise of terrorist attacks on civilians in Turkey in 2015 and 2016 and the July 2016 coup attempt, albeit almost no salient securitization has been witnessed at the level of narratives in the Turkish case. That is, within the Turkish context, when migration has been securitized it has been through practice (rather than through speech acts/discourse), unlike in

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<sup>1</sup> I am not particularly fond of using the term “migration crisis” as the crisis associated with the mass migration after the summer of 2015 was not because of the migration of refugees, asylum-seekers, and irregular migrants *per se*, but mainly due to failure on part of host states to deal with the whole process adequately. Nevertheless, the process ensuing the summer of 2015 resulting in the influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey and EU states will be referred throughout the chapter as the “migration crisis” to sustain coherence with the general literature.

several EU migration countries where hostile discourse has been very important in legitimating policy shifts. As will be elaborated in forthcoming sections, “securitization” within the context of this chapter, following the main presumptions of the Copenhagen School, points to the process which renders an issue a security one, leading to the suspension of daily politics and the introduction of the sense of an urgency and emergency by the elites (see Buzan et al., 1998; Buzan & Wæver, 2003 for main examples of the literature on “securitization”).

In this respect, this case study will aim to broaden our theoretical understanding of the impact of the migration crisis and recent developments regarding the EU border security approach on both levels of narratives and practices in Turkey. At this point, it is crucial to elaborate on the claim that narratives and practices are part of the same process by focusing on the securitization/desecuritization nexus, which is also a central concern within the BordEUR project. Therefore, the first contribution of this chapter will be on theoretical and conceptual grounds. Secondly, by delving into the securitization/desecuritization literature and the discourses of political actors and institutions in Turkey, the chapter will present empirical data on how the shift in security practices regarding migration crisis has been seen in Turkey (although the narratives on the migrants have hardly been ever securitized).

### **Setting the scene:**

#### **Shifts and continuities in migration policies and border management in Turkey**

Turkey has traditionally been a migration country, mainly owing to its geostrategic position and various conflicts and wars in her history. The arrival of the Sephardi in 1492, Hungarian and Polish refugees in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the thousands of Circassian Muslims that fled wars, are among the important events that marked Turkish migratory history (Kirişci, 2000). The country has been a country of emigration during the Cold War, particularly with reference to the ‘Gastarbeiter’ scheme, where Turkish workers migrated to European countries such as Germany, France, and Belgium to fill the demand for cheap labor in a booming postwar European economy. In the post-Cold War period, the country became a destination for immigration instead, especially for the immigrants from the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.

For Turkey, border control has traditionally not been a priority as for the Schengen Europe. This liberal approach to visa-free travel, for instance, helped thousands of Iranians flee the Khomeini’s regime after the Iranian Revolution (Dimitriadi et al., 2018, p. 8). In fact, Turkey saw an important opening towards many countries with the development of trade relations, promoting the mobility of people and goods coming from places like Russia, former Soviet Union countries, Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco, and other Arab states (Afailal & Fernandez, 2018, p. 216).

Beginning in the 2000s, two main processes determined Turkey’s border management perspective: the so-called “soft power” approach in foreign policy, and EU conditionality. The next section will now deal with those two processes against the background of Turkish foreign policy and its relation to the “ontological security” debate.

### **‘Soft power’ and ‘ontological security’ in Turkish foreign policy and their implications on border management**

As argued above, Turkey’s traditionally liberal approach to border management had been even more fostered starting from mid-2000s within the framework of “soft power” approach of the incumbent party, AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-Justice and Development Party*) in foreign policy. Foreign policy has mainly been shaped by various developments and the novel policy tools adopted by the Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, who assumed the position in 2009. In his view, Turkey should pursue a proactive foreign policy, first in the region and then elsewhere in the world. In this vein, the AKP’s “zero problem with neighbors” policy and Turkey’s newly assumed leadership role in the East as a “regional power and global force” (Davutoğlu, 2011) dovetailed with the EU’s push for democratic reforms which were still deemed as credible at that time (Alpan & Öztürk, 2022). In this respect, Turkey’s region-focused activism in the 2000s drew on the construction of a particular foreign policy identity that defined Turkey as a peace-promoting soft power bearing the capacity for “instituting order” in its surrounding regions, namely the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. In this context, Turkey’s foreign policy approach aligned with the EU’s “soft power” approach and employed resources such as “cultural attraction, ideology, and international institutions” (Nye, 1990, p. 167). For Castles and Miller (2009, p. 213), this “soft power approach” in foreign policy also has a direct impact on a state’s immigration policies through acts such as welcoming foreign students as a source of soft power and treatment of immigrants to affect a state’s reputation. Starting from the mid-2000s, as a part of this “soft power” approach in foreign policy, Turkey applied a flexible approach to its neighbors in terms of visa regulations aimed at achieving increased economic, political, and social interactions. This policy was closely related with changed perception of Turkish borders. They started to be treated as lines of contact instead of barriers—the notion, that brought (among other things) liberalization of visa policies with the neighboring countries and softening of the border regimes (Olejarova, 2018, p. 122). Turkey thus became an important destination country for many categories of “migrant.”<sup>2</sup>

In this regard, with respect to this quite liberal approach, migration has never been seen as a threat to the “ontological security” of the Turkish state and Turkish citizens. “Ontological security” is defined here, following Mitzen, as security concerns for the individual and the state which goes beyond just physical threats (Mitzen, 2006, pp. 342–343). In this respect, states do not only seek physical security but also ontological security through routines and habits in a similar way with the individuals (Della Sala, 2017 for good examples of the “ontological security” debate in international relations literature; see Mitzen, 2006; Rumelili, 2015). Similarly, Giddens defines “ontological security” basically as security of being which is obtained through routines, habits, and “feeling at home” which provides a protective cocoon (Giddens, 1991). Starting from the early years of the Republic, Turkey’s ensuing sense of “ontological insecurity” has stigmatized the predominant geopolitical discourse in the country as regards her relations with Europe as well as with various international actors such as Russia and the United States. As a latecomer to the modern state system, Turkey became extra-sensitive to concerns regarding belonging, recognition, and status, which shaped its identity and foreign policy (Piotrowska, 2021). However, migrants have never been a part of this “ontological insecurity” concerns in Turkish history, a trend which

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<sup>2</sup> As of 2022, the number of migrants and refugees residing in Turkey now stands at 3.9 million, over 90 percent of whom are Syrian and came to Turkey as a result of ongoing conflict in Syria and stayed. 3.6 million Syrians have registered for Temporary Protection in Turkey, along with other migrants made up of differing nationalities seeking asylum, international protection, or refugee status (IOM Türkiye, 2022).

has even been more salient with the “soft power” approach of Turkish foreign policy starting from mid-2000s.

### **Turkish Border Management and the EU Conditionality**

Another significant factor that has determined border management in Turkey has been EU accession. Border management became a central theme in EU-Turkey relations and the EU became one of the most important actors driving change since the 2000s. As an EU candidate country, Turkey faced the challenge of aligning its border management with the EU *acquis* as a condition of membership, especially after the 1999 Helsinki decision. Turkey was described as a crucial transit country for irregular migration to the EU as early as 1995 and continues to be regarded as such to this day (Bloch, 2014; İçduygu, 2004; see IOM, 1995; Kaytaz, 2016). However, its role as a destination country is also noteworthy, as noted above. After 1999, Turkey’s border management regime has mainly been regulated by the EU *acquis* and the concomitant migration and asylum policies of the Union.

To start with, from 1999 onwards, one of the EU’s main points of emphasis has that the Turkish approach to border management should be organized on a civilian basis. This perspective also entailed the inclusion of various actors in border management processes such as NGOs or IGOs, displaying a reference to the multi-level governance mentality (Gökalp-Aras, 2020, p. 1). As will be discussed in Section 4, this focus on a civilian migration governance by the EU also made the desecuritization of migration by the Turkish political elites possible at least in the first periods of influx of Syrian refugees. Responding to EU demands for more civilian actors within border management, the Task Force for Asylum, Migration, and External Borders Protection was the first civilian agency established in 2002 (Gökalp-Aras, 2020, p. 9). This has functioned as the “Department of Border Management” since 2015. In parallel, the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), established in 2013, facilitated the collaboration of nonstate and civil society actors as an alternative to the dominance of security and law enforcement institutions. Although Turkey always had a more flexible approach to migration and border management compared to the Schengen Europe, the control and management of Turkey’s borders has traditionally been challenging, which led the country adopt a security-centric law enforcement approach at its borders. Primary responsibility for Turkey’s land border management lies under the Land Forces Command of the Turkish Armed Forces. The Gendarmerie General Command and Turkish police also coordinate closely on land borders. Turkey has a vast coastline and maritime border management is covered by the Turkish Coast Guard Command (Gökalp-Aras, 2020, p. 9). This structure gained a somewhat more civilian framework under the influence of the EU. Along this vein, the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) of the Ministry of Interior—another civilian actor which had been established in 2009—has been designed to take necessary measures for effective emergency management and civil protection nationwide in Turkey, again in parallel with the EU conditionality.

Alongside with this normative focus on a civilian perspective, the EU conditionality also created a distinct legal and institutional structure in Turkey in the realm of migration. The main cornerstone in this respect has been the adoption of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) that entered in force in 2014 (Resmi Gazete, 2013). The LFIP established a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees in Turkey that in many respects mirrors the EU migration and asylum *acquis* (İneli-Ciğer, 2018, p. 115). Moreover, within this context, Turkey has

become a crucial partner for the EU in migration management, more specifically in the prevention of the irregular arrivals of migrants and refugees to Europe. This is significantly evident in the adoption of the Readmission Agreement and Visa Liberalization Dialogue in December 2013, the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan in October 2015, and the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016.

Indeed, the preparations for a readmission agreement with Turkey goes back to 2002 when the negotiating directives for an EC-Turkey readmission agreement were adopted by the EU Council in 2002 (European Union, 2002). The Commission invited Turkey to begin negotiations on a draft text of a readmission agreement in March 2003, but Turkey did not formally acknowledge the invitation until March 2004, based on the concern that the country would then become the final destination for third-country nationals and stateless persons (Bürgin, 2012, p. 888). Turkey, instead, insisted to first conclude readmission agreements with countries of origin to reduce the costs of implementing the EU readmission agreement (Bürgin, 2012, p. 888). The main point emphasized that it would be ready to sign a readmission agreement with the EU that includes own citizens or permanent residents, but not third country nationals (Coleman, 2009, p. 179). Readmission agreement negotiations between Turkey and the EU continued in rounds during 2005 and 2006, to no avail. After the relaunch of negotiations in 2010, an agreement on a draft text was reached in January 2011. In fact, the Commission did not adopt the Turkish demand of a road map with a defined time horizon for the abolition of the visa duty, but instead offered to start a visa dialogue with the clear goal of visa liberalization, once the readmission agreement is signed (Bürgin, 2012, p. 892).

As mentioned earlier, Turkey, through this period, insistently declared that without a visa facilitation process and other steps towards a visa free regime, the readmission agreement will not be signed, initiated, or implemented (İçduygu, 2011). The Visa Liberalization Dialogue (VLD) launched between Turkey and the EU aimed to lift Schengen visa requirement for Turkish citizens during their short stays in the Schengen area and presented a roadmap setting out the 72 benchmarks that Turkey had to meet for the implementation of visa liberalization (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). All in all, the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs Cecilia Malmstrom, with the Turkish Minister of Interior, Muammer Güler, signed the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement and initiated, jointly with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, the EU-Turkey Visa liberalization dialogue on 16 December 2013 (Dimitriadi et al., 2018, p. 10). The requirements covered under the roadmap also overlapped with the areas of Chapter 23 and Chapter 24 (migration and border management, judicial and cooperation, and the fight against drugs). In this context, “the VLD is important not only for providing visa-free travel to Turkish citizens, but also for Turkey’s accession process to EU” (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

The Joint Action Plan (JAP) adopted on 16 October 2015 has also been significant in terms of Turkey’s adoption with the EU *acquis* in the realm of migration and border management. The JAP mainly identified a series of collaborative actions to be implemented as a matter of urgency by the EU and Turkey with the objective to supplement Turkey’s efforts in managing the situation of “massive influx of persons” in need of temporary protection through humanitarian assistance, legal, administrative and operational capacity-building along with cooperation in intelligence and information exchange (European Commission, 2015).

In this vein, the EU-Turkey Deal of March 2016 was a response to the hundreds of thousands of Syrian migrants using the Eastern Mediterranean route to enter Europe during the summer of 2015. The

deal was largely driven by German political will to resolve the rapidly evolving refugee protection crisis, maintain unity in the EU amongst member states, and reduce the increased numbers that were arriving in Greece. The drivers from EU point of view were controlling EU borders effectively while keeping EU solidarity, helping the overburdened Greek asylum system, reducing if not stopping deaths at sea, and maintaining security within the EU against serious threats such as ISIS (Dimitriadi et al., 2018, p. 16). Among the EU member states, Germany had a special role during the negotiation process preceding the deal (Slominski & Trauner, 2018) not only due to its steering role in the formation of both EU policies in general and the EU's enlargement politics vis-a-vis Turkey in particular (Turhan, 2016, p. 26), but also because Germany hosts the highest number of refugees in comparison with other member states. which calls for the return of "all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands" and possibility of rejecting the same migrants' asylum request based on the identification of Turkey as a 'safe third country" or 'first country of asylum' (European Commission, 2016).

Thus, two central processes, i.e., the "soft power" approach in Turkish foreign policy and EU conditionality have been the crucial driving forces behind migration and border management policies. This was the background when the migration crisis erupted in 2011 (which had indeed been a "crisis" in the EU parlance after the summer of 2015 when thousands of Syrians as well as other irregular migrants from other countries aimed at crossing the land and sea borders of Turkey to the reach the EU territories). Within this context, this chapter argues that Turkey has desecuritized the crisis in the first place, which had been followed by a securitization move at the practice level especially after 2015/2016 (though not intertwined with a securitizing narrative). Before delving into details of these shifts, it is important to explore what we mean when we talk about securitization and desecuritization, which will be scrutinized in the following section.

### **Theoretical Background: Securitization/desecuritization nexus**

From the late 1990s, securitization theory has been an important component of the debate between those who claim that threats are objective (i.e., what really constitutes a threat to international security) on the one hand, and those arguing that security is subjective (what is perceived to be a threat) on the other (van Munster, 2012). In this dichotomy, the concept of "securitization" points to that tendency, where an issue becomes a security issue—not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because it is presented as such by the political actors (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 24–26). Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan, the core scholars of the Copenhagen School, defined securitization as a successful speech act "through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat" (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 491). By labelling an issue as a security problem, "an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means" (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 26). In the process of securitization, there are three key factors: the speech act, the securitizing actor, and the target audience (Knudsen, 2001). The realization of an issue becoming an existential threat depends on the constructing, framing, and marketing of such an issue to a greater audience by the agents of securitization such as by the military elites or politicians.

Although the Copenhagen School's focus on securitization has created a great conceptual toolkit to understand speech acts and how particular issues become security issues, the School's arguments have



various limitations as identified by different scholars. These include a lack of analysis of rival views (i.e. attention to rival voices and counter-securitizations), overemphasis of speech acts and under-analysis of nondiscursive practices, an elitist framework, a decisionist approach that assumes that securitization occurs at the moment when the audience accepts the securitizing actor's proposal, the framework's Eurocentric perception, and overemphasis on macro-level discourses while ignoring micro-level practices (Baysal, 2020, pp. 5–6; Ünal-Eriş & Öner, 2021, p. 166). Several scholars, especially those from the Paris School, have also moved away from the traditional definition of securitization as a 'speech act' to develop an understanding of securitization as a field effect. The main presumption of the Paris School is that there is a merger of 'internal' and 'external' security into a 'field of security,' whereby the border between the two ceases to exist. The border between 'internal' and 'external' here is tantamount to the borders of sovereign nation states (Bigo, 2001, pp. 91–116) According to Bigo (2000, p. 175), the end of bipolarity and the emergence of the EU have both contributed to the blurring of this distinction. Instead, security is a field which is mainly about *the Other*, entailing the excluded parts of the society. For Huysmans (2006, pp. 4, 6), another prominent scholar of the School, "this interpretation broadens the notion of insecurity from the [traditional] threat definition to the political and institutional framing of policy issues in what can be referred to as 'domains of insecurity.' That is, to decide what creates insecurity and what does not is itself a political move and the state of insecurity is politically and socially constructed." This is very close to what Foucault earlier described as "governmentality," where the limits of the "normal" are drawn by the disciplining aspect of power. From this perspective, securitization may involve a speech act and/or various other administrative, bureaucratic and legal practices (i.e. security acts) (Balzacq et al., 2016; Wilkinson, 2007, p. 12).

In this framework, it comes as no surprise that the field of migration, particularly in Europe and the EU, is a significant focus of securitization studies (Balzacq et al., 2016; Bello, 2017; for good recent examples see Lazaridis & Wadia, 2015). Over the last two decades, securitization, as a theoretical proposition, has expanded widely and today its distinctiveness lies in its 'capacity to articulate a specific approach to security—influenced by the speech act—with an "analytics of government," which emphasizes practices and processes (Balzacq et al., 2016, p. 494).

On the other hand, the main argument about desecuritization by the Copenhagen School scholars, is that it involves "the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere" (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 4). That is, what we see is the shift from emergency politics to normal politics within which the security speech act becomes absent. Huysmans (1998, p. 574) approaches desecuritization from a broader perspective in his analysis of migration as a security issue in Europe, where "[it] is a more holistic normative re-evaluation of how the political government should be organized." Desecuritization also needs to be understood with regard to a specific historical context, which not only takes the agents into consideration but also unpacks the structural conditions within which the ideas and strategies of agents are shaped, formed, and developed (Al & Byrd, 2018, p. 614)

From the outset, it could be inferred from the securitization literature that desecuritization follows securitization, and desecuritization means that "security is unmade" (Donnelly, 2015, p. 915). Nevertheless, Bourbeau and Vuori (2015) have suggested that very little attention has been paid to instances in which "desecuritization arise before security—when securitization is brewing." In this respect, it could be the case that desecuritization takes place in form of *change through stabilization*, when an issue is cast in terms rather than security (for a debate on types of desecuritization, see Hansen, 2012).

This chapter would subscribe to the claim that desecuritization does not have to follow a process of securitization; the desecuritization could aim at presenting a particular issue in a particular non-security context whereas the very issue is constantly being securitized elsewhere by other actors. This has been exactly the case in terms of the framing of the migration crisis in Turkey from the start by the political actors, which had been narrated as a “humanitarian” one by the Turkish political actors from the start. Nevertheless, the escalation of the terrorist attacks on civilians starting from 2015 and the coup attempt of July 2016 in Turkey had been turning points in this respect, where the general dosage of securitizing narratives in Turkish political scene and political polarization had been too high. This resulted in a rather securitized border management practice albeit the political narratives on the migration crisis was not dominantly securitized.

One question that might rise at this very point is whether this bifurcation between narratives and practices after 2015/2016 within the Turkish case is still securitization, which usually refers to discourse which then justifies exclusionary policy moves. More recent perspectives on securitization, some examples of which has been given above, directly or indirectly address this very question, drawing on the general criticism that Copenhagen School focuses on speech act too much (and Balzacq, 2011 for further elaboration of this criticism; see Hansen, 2000; Wilkinson, 2007). For instance, rather than focusing on speech act, Balzacq (2011, p. 22) emphasises the role of practices (i.e. the security acts) in securitization. By the same token, Wilkinson (2007, p. 12) builds upon this criticism of how securitization focuses too heavily on verbal speech rather than other means of expression that a securitizing actor or agent might use. That is, the very bifurcation between border management narratives and practices within the Turkish context does not necessarily lead to the omission of securitization from the picture, as the recent theoretical debates on securitization/desecuritization suggest. In this respect, it is important to explore how narratives and practices in the realm of migration displayed varying examples of securitization and desecuritization in Turkish politics at different times, which the fourth section intends to.

### **Securitization/desecuritization nexus at work:**

#### **How did Turkey construct border management narratives and practices?**

As already argued above, migration has never been an issue of “ontological security” and thus has never been a topic for securitization agenda in the Turkish political landscape. Nevertheless, post-2011 period displays a different story in terms of securitization/desecuritization nexus. When the first Syrian refugees had arrived at the country in 2011, the issue of migration was completely desecuritized both in terms of narratives of political actors and border management practices. When the first Syrian refugees had fled to Turkey in April 2011, initially, the AKP government expected that the Assad regime would soon collapse, and it estimated that around 100,000 Syrians at most would stay in Turkey for two or three weeks (E. Erdoğan, 2014). Following the escalation of the domestic conflicts in Syria, the AKP government declared an open-door policy toward the Syrian refugees in October 2011. Accordingly, Turkey allowed Syrians with passports to enter the country freely, and treated those who had entered without documents in a similar way. It guaranteed the principle of non-refoulement, offered temporary protection, and committed itself to providing the best possible living conditions and humanitarian assistance for refugees (İçduygu, 2015).

Right after the arrival of first group of migrants, President Erdoğan (2014) argued that it was a religious and historical responsibility to provide refugee to the Syrian refugees. In his speech in Gaziantep, one of the most popular destinations for the Syrian refugees in the Syrian border, then Prime Minister Davutoğlu (2014) publicly stated that the inhabitants of Gaziantep are a city of *Ansar*: “Gaziantep is an Ansar city now. God, bless you all.” Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş (2016) used a similar rhetoric when he introduced the right to work for Syrian refugees under temporary protection and referred to the “hospitality and Ansar spirit that our nation has so far adhered to (...) But contrary to what the rich and prosperous countries could not do for the refugees, our country did its best for the refugees as a generous host, friend, brother and neighbor.”

In this line of argument, Turkey claimed to become a global protector of the normative framework of refugee protection (Dimitriadi et al., 2018, p. 9). Indeed, the AKP leadership redeployed a path dependent, ethno-cultural, and religious logic that underlined the Islamic discourses of ‘guesthood’ and the ‘Ansar spirit’ (i.e. historical protector of the migrant/refugee) in receiving and welcoming Syrian refugees—a logic based on the quest to become a ‘soft power’ in the Middle East, as scrutinized in the previous sections (Kaya, 2020, p. 347). The main common denominator of the ruling political elite is that the Syrian refugees are being portrayed and framed by means of an act of benevolence. Hence, the assistance of the state to the refugees is accomplished based on charity, rather than universally recognized rights that are supposed to be granted to refugees fleeing their homelands. Such a religious based discourse with regards to the reception of Syrian refugees in Turkey has also been embraced by the bureaucrats working in the migration sector as well as local authorities and civil society actors (Kaya, 2020, p. 29). In this respect, this approach by the incumbent AKP could also be seen as the AKP’s tendency to resolve identity contestations inside the country through foreign policy tools, as argued by Hintz (2018). Or alternatively, the intake of Syrian refugees and their inclusion in the new Turkish ‘People’ might have had the aim of challenging the Kemalist national identity so that the AKP had to reconfigure to establish its own sovereignty and a new social contract alternative to that of Kemalism with the rising number of Ottoman references in political and daily routine (Ongur & Zengin, 2019, p. 110).

As explored above, the institutional structure of Turkish border management has also provided a conducive framework for the desecuritization of border practices from the start. The civilian institutions established in line with the EU conditionality such as the DGMM and AFAD has taken the lead in managing temporary accommodation centers (refugee camps) for Syrians near border cities. Municipal councils—also considered civilian actors—provided first response emergency and humanitarian aid in the border regions. Some semiofficial associations, such as the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC—*Kızılay*), which has a “Migration and Refugee Services Department,” have also been involved. The IOM has also been the most active border management intergovernmental organization in Turkey, particularly since 2011. In this picture, a multi-level governance perspective had been adopted in terms of dealing with the migration crisis: Turkish state actors exclusively assumed a *control* function, while NGOs and IGOs were assigned a *care* function (Gökalp-Aras, 2020, p. 1). In this understanding, *control* is still the task of the state, but *care* is shared among new actors through sub-contracting.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The recent literature on governance of migration critically draws on two important roles tackled with in terms of the daily governance of mobile populations: operational exercises of *care* and *control* (Gökalp-Aras, 2020; İşleyen, 2018; Papada, 2021). In particular, the treatment of Syrian refugees in Turkey has been characterized by the logics of control and care, where control

However, this has changed along the way while Turkish political life became more complicated and polarizing especially after the 2016 coup attempt and ensuing state of emergency, which led to a strict securitization of border management practices. This has also been intertwined with the worsening security situation in Syria, which had security repercussions on countries hosting Syrians including Turkey and the rising political polarization in the country against the background of June 2015 general elections and November 2015 snap elections. Between June and November, Turkey witnessed a sharp rise in political violence and terrorism as a result of the renewal of the fighting between the PKK militants and the security forces in the southeast and two major terrorist attacks by ISIS (Sayarı, 2016, p. 269). Both of these developments, and especially the attacks carried out by ISIS, were strongly influenced by the continuing turmoil and civil war in neighboring Syria (European Commission, 2016; Tharoor, 2015). Especially when Turkey began to be directly and indirectly involved in operations in Northern Syria, a series of terrorist attacks killed and wounded hundreds of civilians in Turkey in 2015 and 2016. On 20 July 2015, an explosion triggered by an ISIS suicide bomber against a group of Turkish leftists in the southeastern town of Suruç claimed 27 lives and left over 100 wounded.<sup>4</sup> On 10 October 2015, only three weeks before the snap election, an even more massive explosion caused by two ISIS suicide bombers at the “Labour, Peace and Democracy Rally” in Ankara killed 95 people and wounded more than 200.<sup>5</sup> In another ISIS suicide attack in Istanbul on 10 January 2016; thirteen people lost their lives in total and sixteen people were injured (cited in Karakoç-Dora, 2020, p. 513). On 28 June 2016, three separate suicide attacks were carried out in the International Terminal of İstanbul Atatürk Airport by ISIS, as a result, 48 people lost their lives and 240 people were injured (cited in Karakoç-Dora, 2020: 513). Apart from these cases many other ISIS and PKK attacks were held in Ankara, İstanbul, Adana, Kilis, Mersin, Diyarbakır, and many other cities. Particularly, the terrorist attacks in Suruç and Ankara sent shock waves throughout the country. The fact that ISIS had come close to Turkey’s borders with Syria and Iraq had already led to heightened security concerns among the people (Sayarı, 2016, p. 270).

Along this vein, this has also been the period when the AKP government came to feel less secure especially after the rise of PKK and ISIS terrorism and the failed coup attempt of July 2016, which was also reflected in the country’s foreign policy move (Gülseven, 2021). In particular, the coup attempt of 15 July 2016 put Turkish historical sedimented discourses on security into question and triggered society-wide anxiety—“a feeling of inner turmoil over the uncertainty of anticipated events” (Adisonmez & Onursal, 2020, p. 298). Due to the imagination of state borders as bounded space, the real “crisis” occurred when the Turkish state felt it was no longer able to control its economy, labor, commodities, environment, information, or unwanted aliens (Kinnvall et al., 2018).

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is associated with “filtering” the refugees and introducing “hierarchies of deserving and undeserving subjects” (Casaglia & Pacciardi, 2022, p. 1), whereas *care* includes provision of their basic needs including shelter, sustenance, and medical care.

<sup>4</sup> The suicide attack targeted a group of university students associated with the youth wing of ESP (*Ezilenlerin Sosyalist Partisi-Socialist Party of the Oppressed*) and the SGDF (*Sosyalist Gençlik Dernekleri Federasyonu-Socialist Youth Associations Federation*), who were giving a press statement on their planned trip to reconstruct the Syrian border town of Kobani.

<sup>5</sup> The blast known as, “Ankara Train Station Massacre,” as it took place outside the city’s central railway station, targeted the participants of “Labour, Peace, and Democracy” rally organized by DISK (*Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu—the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey*), TMMOB (*Türk Mühendis ve Mimar Odaları Birliği—the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects*), HDP (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi—the Peoples' Democratic Party*), TTB (*Türk Tabipler Birliği-the Turkish Medical Association*), and KESK (*Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu—the Confederation of Public Workers' Unions*).

Nevertheless, even at the heat of events, no direct linkage of the rising terrorism to the open-door policy was made by the Turkish political elites. Indeed, at a more general level, there was no explicit discursive shift in terms of securitizing the Syrian refugees in by the political elites after 2016. There was no “suspension of daily politics,” as the securitization theoretical framework suggests (Buzan et al., 1998). For instance, Prime Minister Erdoğan stated on 13 March 2016 that, “Ankara’s open-door policy for Syrian refugees will continue due to the responsibility coming from Islamic civilization, contrary to Western hypocrisy” (Sabah, 2016). Similarly, the President’s spokesperson and AKP member İbrahim Kalın argued that “we would never force [the then] 3.7 million Syrians to return back to their countries” (cited in Sputnik, 2019).

That is, as this chapter argues, there had not been a salient shift after 2015/2016 in terms of securitizing narratives which targeted the Syrian refugees in Turkish political scene. The level of criticism posed against the Syrian refugees was not as high as it had been the in the European context, which would amount to a fully-fledged securitizing narrative. Similarly, no political party, as it had been the case with Germany’s AfD or the UK’s UKIP, has made dealing with the “refugee crisis” its political priority or *raison d’être*. Yet, there had been a relative discursive shift in depicting “the refugee crisis” by the political actors, raising the tone of criticism, putting the blame on either the EU (on part of the AKP) or on the AKP’s approach to migration (in case of opposition parties). That is, there has never been “suspension of daily politics” as the securitization framework suggests. On the contrary, the “refugee crisis” has been a part of the daily politics.

One of the main arguments that had been raised in this context, especially by the AKP figures, was that the West (and the EU in particular) is not proactive enough in terms of “burden-sharing” (for a good discussion see Iscan, 2021). Erdoğan frequently pointed out the lack of effort and financial support from the United Nations (UN) and the EU for the Syrian refugees, arguing that, “we do not have the word ‘idiot’ on our foreheads. We already had the people [Syrians] returning from Edirne [the European border of Turkey]. This will repeat only once or twice. [If you do not help us financially], we can open the gates and tell them goodbye” (“Erdoğan’dan AB’ye mülteci krizi tepkisi,” 2016). Along this vein, the whole issue of Syrian refugees is linked to the AKP’s broader political agenda. “One day after the European Parliament called for a pause in the country’s EU Accession talks over the Turkish government’s repressive response to the July 2016 coup attempt, Erdoğan declared that ‘we are the ones who feed 3–3.5 million refugees in this country . . . You have betrayed your promises. If you go any further those border gates will be opened’” (cited in Tsourapas, 2019, p. 475). Similarly, the then-prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu argued in 2016 (regarding the Syrian refugees), “we want this human tragedy to end,” detailing how Turkey wanted “our citizens to travel visa free, and the Customs Union to be updated” (cited in Tsourapas, 2019, p. 475).

Another dimension of the discursive shift in terms of the “refugee crisis” after 2015/2016 was the economic impact of the Syrian refugees on Turkey, especially aired by the opposition parties. One of the main arguments of the main opposition party, CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi-Republican People’s Party*) was that the Turkish government should reserve jobs for the Turks, not for the Syrians (cited in Gülmez, 2019, p. 895). Another widely debated statement came recently from Tanju Özcan the mayor of Turkish northern province of Bolu, also a member of CHP, who announced that he would propose to the Local Assembly a motion to charge a tenfold fee for the water bills of “foreigners,” in reference to the Syrian refugees (Sabah, 2021).

On a different note, the background of the heightened waters in Turkish security atmosphere in the 2015/2016 period outlined above, and the growing number of refugees, ultimately resulted in the revision of this “open-door” policy, completely securitizing the border practices at the Turkish Eastern border. As regards Turkey’s course of action against ISIS and PKK and its pattern of border management, the summer of 2015 marked the beginning of a period in which the Turkish state progressively augmented its direct cross-border military action against the PKK and ISIS, which resulted in a complete seal-off of the Syrian border.

To start with, the active cross-border air offensive carried out by the Turkish Air Force against ISIS and PKK was accompanied by a large-scale border security project called the “Syrian border physical security system,” which included the erection of 192 kilometers of wall (*Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2016). Launched in July 2015 and costing 2 billion Turkish liras, this comprised measures including the erection of modular walls, barbed-wire barriers and mobile watchtowers, and the installation of high-tech cameras at the border (*Milliyet*, 2015). In May 2017, Turkish state-owned defence company Aselsan was awarded the contract for the supply of armored and unarmored mobile surveillance units for border control. Aselsan also developed two types of surveillance and reconnaissance balloons for use along the borders with Syria and Iraq. The “Water Drop” and the “Global” balloons will have protection against light weapons and should be in the air 24/7, providing information to military bases and outposts (*Akkerman*, 2018, p. 73).

This securitization trend was also reflected in the adoption of restrictions at the Syrian border towards the Syrian refugees. From March to early June 2015, Turkey closed all border crossing points to individuals, including Syrian citizens who are passport holders, until it admitted over 15,000 Syrians who fled from the increased fighting in Tel-Abyad (*Memisoglu & Ilgit*, 2017, p. 329). In February 2016, nearly 70,000 people were stranded near the southeast border town Kilis, mostly fleeing the bombing around Aleppo. Turkey for the first time did not open its borders to this new influx and instead opted to assist them on the other side of the border, building makeshift camps and providing for basic needs (*Memisoglu & Ilgit*, 2017, p. 329). One official working in the migration and asylum field argued that his “day-to-day job since 2016 involved providing security background checks and sensitive border crossing analysis” (*Dimitriadi et al.*, 2018, p. 23).

## Conclusions

The Summer of 2015 witnessed one of the most severe humanitarian crises Europe has faced recently with the massive influx of Syrian refugees to the region, which drastically challenged the EU’s Integrated Border Management System, rendering the “crisis” a European one. Turkey, on the other hand, received Syrian refugees fleeing civil war from the beginning of the war in 2011 thanks to its “open-door policy.” The individuals who fled to Turkey were, at least initially, referred to as “guests,” not “refugees” or “asylum-seekers,” even though this term has no equivalence in international law. This process culminated in the signing of March 2016 EU-Turkey Deal, which aimed to streamline the flux of Syrian refugees to the EU borders, thereby controlling the EU borders effectively while keeping EU solidarity, rendering Turkey a new EU borderland.

The main aim of this chapter is to explore how the topic of Syrian migration has been framed in Turkish political terrain. The main argument in this respect is that unlike the case in most of the EU

member states, where the “migration crisis” had been securitized from the start, the Turkish side rather desecuritized the crisis, seeing the deal as a “moral” and “ethical” move and blamed the EU for “getting away” from its core values and principles. During this period, securitization of migration had been the main glue in European politics, connecting populist radical right parties and the mainstream parties in their anti-immigrant discourses and policies, especially after the 2015 refugee crisis<sup>6</sup> (Ünal-Eriş & Öner, 2021, p. 186). On the other hand, migration has never been an issue of extant securitization or populist appeal as it had been the case with Germany’s AfD or UKIP in the UK. Both incumbent and opposition parties in Turkey have used the “refugee card” to appeal to the growing social, economic, and cultural grievances of their voters, but in a rather selective and limited manner (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019, p. 39). The main reason for the lack of a complete discursive securitization of the “migration crisis” is that Syrian refugees were never seen as a threat to the “ontological security” of the Turkish state and Turkish citizens, as it has frequently been the case in most of the EU countries.

Nevertheless, Turkey had of course its own baggage of “ontological insecurity.” The escalation of terrorist attacks on civilians in 2015 and the July 2016 coup attempt triggered society-wide anxiety and led the state return to its usual “state survival” discourse. Therefore, after 2015 and 2016, the border management practices particularly at Turkey’s southeastern border were completely securitized, yet not finding a narrative counterpart in the political scene completely. Even if there had been a relative discursive shift in depicting “the refugee crisis” by the political actors after 2015/2016, raising the tone of criticism, there has never been “suspension of daily politics” as the securitization framework suggests. On the contrary, the “refugee crisis” has been a part of the daily politics.

That is, although we witness a wide range of the securitization of bordering practices especially after 2015/2016, we do not see an overall discursive securitization regarding the “migration crisis” in the Turkish political landscape. The issue has still not been included in the elements that determine politics in Turkey, despite more than 4 million refugees in Turkey, the majority of whom are Syrians (M. Erdoğan, 2020, p. 76). However, the security concerns are quite high among society, and these concerns will eventually influence daily politics. Instead of an overall discursive securitization of the “migration crisis,” what we see is an “everyday securitization” of the Syrian refugees. The news coming from schools where parents do not want their children to go to the same schools with Syrian kids or from ordinary people who demand the deportation of male Syrian refugees between ages 17 and 45 show that there is a rising tension in society against the Syrians, which would eventually find resonance in party politics or election rallies. As Erdoğan (2020, p. 76) puts it, “securitization is a bottom-up process in Turkey arising from ‘society/grassroots,’ and despite all the efforts from the state and the bureaucracy, it gets stronger day by day.”

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note at this point that the EU position was of course more nuanced and showed variation across member states and through time, which is the topic of another study.

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## Chapter 5

### **The Border as a Symbolic Resource: Lessons from Hungary**

*András Szalai*

#### **Introduction**

The processes of globalization and supranational integration have progressively shifted powers and competencies away from nation states. In the European Union the idea of a borderless Europe, with de-territorialized power dispersed across multiple institutional areas, created a complex playing field that national governments need to navigate. Even though integration has in many ways enhanced the competencies of EU member states, it also increased the flow of information and people across borders, which in turn challenged a key aspect of state sovereignty: controlling who and what crosses the border (Basile & Mazzoleni, 2019). This process did not usher in the end of the sovereign state, but was not free of crises, either.

Economic interdependence and shared authority limit policy decisions for states. With their effective policymaking power straitjacketed, political elites have had difficulties responding to challenges and representing the popular will. But there is one crucial domain where they retain considerable agency: narrative construction. Narratives constructed for domestic audiences can be used to reframe, mobilize, and manipulate ontological insecurities by assigning blame and charting possible futures. The focal point of this edited volume, narratives about where Europe's borders lie, are not just about the reification of existing, hard physical borders, but also about the construction of possible borders through defining an imaginary European identity. Both the EU itself and its member states are active participants in this narrative field of contestation as they construct stories about what happened, to whom, and why, as we talk about crises, threats, and uncertainty. This chapter investigates how a member state, Hungary, illustrates the logic of national populist narratives on borders that are designed both to create and mitigate ontological insecurities for social control, and actively challenge European mainstream liberal narratives.

Hungary is not unique in terms of its Eurosceptic populism: structural transformations, crises, and the increased emphasis on communication have created a fertile ground for a populist pushback against the EU. Populism as a particular way of discourse/style can act as a filter to redress political problems, identify those responsible, reset the political agenda, and offer visions for a better future. Yet, as I will demonstrate, Hungary can still be taken as a laboratory example of the workings of two key elements of European nationalist populism: 'crisis talk' and sovereignty.

Through crisis narratives, populists intertwine legitimation strategies around strong leadership, and affective stories of nostalgia about a past filled with greatness and stability. Populist crisis narratives instill rather than reduce ontological insecurity in the audience by painting an apocalyptic vision of imminent danger—while also framing the populist's agenda as the solution. Such 'crisis talk' significantly impacts voter behavior as it triggers voters' cognitive biases, including otherwise dormant authoritarian predispositions (Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Forgas & Lantos, 2020; Homolar & Scholz, 2019; Rico et al., 2017).

The other key shared aspect of the European populist pushback, and by extension the Hungarian government's narratives on borders, is the rise to a new discourse, sovereignty. Sovereignism is about a return to a traditional territorial understanding of sovereignty centered around the nation-state and the imaginary community it embodies (Basile & Mazzoleni, 2019).<sup>1</sup> Since borders are key to stable conceptions of the (nation)state, they are a crucial symbolic tool to sovereignist narratives and sites where security can be performed (Rudolph, 2005).

The subject of this chapter, Hungary, is a textbook case for both elements: nationalist populist crisis talk and sovereignism. Hungary was hit hard by the 2008 financial crisis, which erupted on top of an ongoing political crisis.<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister Viktor Orbán capitalized on resulting ontological insecurities, painting his 2010 landslide victory as a new era of national unity, and himself as a crisis leader. In the past decade, he successfully solidified his hold over the country and gradually dismantled democratic institutions—all justified through permanent crisis talk. This process of de-democratization in Hungary has been told many times. Scholars emphasize Orbán's warlike rhetoric, investigate his contentious policies, and seek to classify his self-styled illiberal regime (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2018; Csehi, 2019; Kopper et al., 2020; Körösenyi et al., 2020; Krekó & Enyedi, 2018; A. L. Pap, 2018; Scheppele, 2015). One common thread across these works is that they tend to highlight Orbán's nationalist populist rhetoric, and the ways in which he skillfully renegotiates Hungary's role in Europe and in the wider Euro-Atlantic region, putting an end to the post-cold war elite consensus about Hungary's linear development from post-communist state to EU member (Fowler, 2007). Crisis talk has been instrumental in solidifying and maintaining the Orbán regime's hold on Hungarian politics and is a constant source of constructed antagonism between the regime and the European Union.

Hungary was also a forerunner in securitizing and militarizing borders in 2015. Although this securitizing discourse and the practices it justifies are now much more widespread in the EU, bordering in Hungary is illustrative for the interlinkages of sovereignty, populism, and nationalism. While populism establishes antagonism vertically, between an 'elite' and 'People,' nationalism does so horizontally, between an 'inside' and 'those outside' (Brubaker, 2020). Nevertheless, since both 'the People' and 'the elite' are empty signifiers (Ostiguy & Moffitt, 2020), populists can readily construct 'the People' along ethnocultural lines as well. Populists like Orbán then twist the sovereignist narrative and offer a vision of the future where the empowerment of the nation state through its borders offers citizens a way to "take back control" from international elites and their proxies, like migrants. The dramatization of securitized borders, sovereignism, and nationalist populism seem to go hand in hand. Yet in the case of states like Hungary, where state borders and historical borders that connect the national community do not overlap, nationalist and populist discourses often clash. Here, borders serve a dual, and contradictory role: on the one hand, they act as a site of conflict between sovereignist forces and threats to borders. On the other hand, they also separate politically important kin-communities in neighboring states from the Hungarian kin-state (Merabishvili, 2020; Scott, 2018; Szalai & Kopper, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> Sovereignism has acted as a counternarrative to globalization for decades but has received new impetus through the current wave of populism. New research shows that populists, beyond their common appeal to 'the People' against 'corrupt elites,' also make renewed claims for an enhancement of national sovereignty (Basile & Mazzoleni, 2019; Kallis, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> The cause of the political crisis was a leaked speech made by Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány in 2006, wherein he admitted lying to voters about the state of the economy. The leak led to mass riots in Budapest, and severely weakened the Socialist Party, Fidesz's mainstream counterweight. Gyurcsány refused to resign until 2009, which contributed to Orbán's landslide victory in 2010.

Crisis narratives, crisis governance, and a need for the reaffirmation of charismatic legitimacy have become part and parcel of the populist Orbán regime as well and are routinely used to legitimize the use of “unorthodox” policies and the development of a uniquely Hungarian “national path.” Crucially, Orbán also exemplifies populism in power (and in near absolute power at that), and therefore falls under similar constraints as mainstream politicians across Europe. After a decade in power as *the elite*, how can a leader still claim to be anti-elitist, a sole representative of the popular will?

The two paradoxes that Orbán needs to navigate in his discourse, i.e., the clash between nationalism and sovereignism, and the anti-elitism and populism in power, form the conceptual backdrop of this analysis. As mentioned, borders play a dual symbolic role within Hungarian discourse. On the one hand, they are obstacles that need to be overcome to unite a fragmented Hungarian nation. Fidesz’s nationalism emphasizes the need for national unification, and the party has been a staunch supporter of EU enlargement towards neighboring states which host Hungarian kin-communities that ended up across the border after World War I: first Romania and Croatia, then Serbia. Enlargement namely offers a quasi-borderless region where the nation is finally unified. On the other hand, however, securitized and militarized borders require a more limited framing of national territory, one that is more in line with state borders. These borders literally divide the expanded national territory that the nationalist rhetoric embodies.

I argue in this chapter that to navigate this paradox, Orbán has expanded his narrative to be not just about Hungarian borders, but about the borders of Europe. In doing so, he relies on populism’s particular style of Othering. By moving the antagonism of ‘elites’ versus ‘the People’ to the international/European level, the Orbán government successfully expands its border crisis narrative to mitigate the inherent contradictions between transborder nationalism and *state* border security. The regime enjoys little to no political opposition domestically, yet it is still subject to potential challenges. To control opposition and mobilize support, the regime and its ‘Leader’ need to maintain the ability to act and find new, external elites so that they can frame themselves as anti-elites or underdogs. This chapter shows that Orbán can achieve several goals by mapping the ‘elite versus People’ antagonism onto European elites critical of the regime, and by shifting the sovereignist discourse from national borders to protecting Europe’s borders and identity. First, he can frame himself as an able leader, one who has responsibilities for not only Hungarians, but Europeans as a whole. Second, he can style himself as a protector of Hungarian sovereignty, a protector that is in constant conflict with malign, external forces. Third, he can depict himself as an example to others in Europe, and thereby find allies in European debates. Fourth, he can depict himself as a soft-Eurosceptic, one that is fighting for the soul of Europe by renegotiating Europe’s borders and identity.

Thus, the focus of my study will markedly be on discourse, and not on bordering practices. As the chapter demonstrates, border militarization, restrictive visa regimes, and draconian laws that criminalize irregular border crossings all have limited practical effectiveness when it comes to keeping migrants and refugees outside of Hungary—a goal that was better served by the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, for instance. Instead, bordering practices in Hungary are highly performative. On the one hand, they act as securitizing tools that transform an entity (migrants) or a process (migration) into a threat (cf. Balzacq, 2007). On the other hand, they act as securitizing instruments which are symbolic proactive measures against a perceived threat that suggest what the government is thinking about a threat, but also convey an image of active leadership (Williams, 2003). Thus, ultimately, these policies are not about border control,

but about maintaining an atmosphere of crisis for political mobilization and policy justification. They symbolize state borders under threat in political clashes on the European level.<sup>3</sup>

The chapter is organized as follows. In the next section, I will briefly discuss how populist narratives construct crises and employ sovereignist tropes to maintain ontological insecurities for social control. Next, I will discuss the paradoxical duality of borders in Orbán's rhetoric, exhibited through his policies of national unification (and kin-community mobilization), and Orbán's extreme securitization of migration since 2015. The subsequent sections will rely on a corpus of key speeches to show the gradual renegotiation of the 'Us versus Them' logic of populism that expanded the category of 'the People' to a reified group of 'true Europeans' through a civilizational discourse, while in parallel moving anti-elitism to European elites. This shift offered a solution to the paradox of dual borders. In the final section I will offer conclusions and discuss how this rhetoric on borders is utilized to maintain ontological insecurities in the Hungarian electorate—more recently in the 2022 election campaign vis-à-vis the Russo-Ukrainian War—and simultaneously enable Orbán to spearhead the European populist movement as a disruptive force to the liberal status quo.

### **Nationalist populism, ontological security, and crisis**

This chapter argues that to understand the symbolic role of borders in contemporary Hungarian politics, it is essential to investigate Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's rhetoric, which shows key characteristics of populism. To highlight the performative role borders play, the chapter understands populism as "a political style that features an appeal to 'the People' versus 'the elite,' 'bad manners,' and the performance of crisis, breakdown, or threat" (Moffitt, 2018, p. 4). The populism-as-style approach suggests that a movement is not populist because its ideology shows certain characteristics that can be defined as populist, but because it uses a certain logic of articulation (Laclau, 2005b, p. 33). This logic of articulation that we call populist pits an essentialized and idealized 'people' against an opposing Other, most commonly domestic and/or foreign 'elites' (Stavrakakis, 2006, p. 259); and achieves its appeal through disruptive plebian "bad manners" (Moffitt, 2016; Wodak, 2015) and the dramatization of the failure of mainstream politics, crises, and disruptions (Ostiguy et al., 2021, p. 3).

Populists define 'the People' in exclusionary terms: they argue that only some people are the real, authentic, and pure people, who are deserving of good governance. The populist leader then frames him/herself as the sole legitimate representative of 'the People' and uses popular sovereignty to justify such measures. The way populists define 'the elite' varies from context to context and across time, and so do the enemy Others (migrants, civil society, ethnic minorities, etc.) that populists link to elites (Urbiniati, 2019).

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<sup>3</sup> As the war in Ukraine unfolds many European populists offer a radically different framing for Ukrainian refugees than they did for those from Syria and Afghanistan. This discrepancy highlights the racialized aspects of European rightwing populism and will need to be the subject of future analysis. For the purposes of this chapter, it is also worth highlighting that the current Hungarian government is engaged in a domestic propaganda campaign that seeks to distance Orbán from the war as he has been a staunch ally of Vladimir Putin for a decade. This propaganda campaign is markedly supportive of Russian narratives, and frames Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as well as European allies, as actors hostile to Hungary. However, the set of discursive tools used to other refugees and migrant from the Middle East since 2015 have not yet been wielded against Ukrainian refugees at the time of writing. Therefore, governmental discourses vis-à-vis Ukrainian refugees, and the policies it potentially enables, lie beyond the scope of this analysis.

Due to embedded antagonism between ‘the People’ and ‘the elites,’ populist discourse can be utilized strategically. It can be employed to frame threats so that they exacerbate collective insecurities (both ontological and physical), and thereby generate support for various policy measures that purportedly counter the threat. For nationalist populism, like the one in Hungary, this framing process frequently involves the construction of collective identities, the maintenance and aggravation of the divide between the ingroup and outgroups, and the definition of otherness (e.g. migration<sup>4</sup>) as an imminent or latent threat to the people (Béland, 2020, p. 167). Through the dramatization of threat, populists convey a need to act decisively and immediately, while styling themselves as the only source of security.

Ernesto Laclau (2005a, p. 177) noted the importance of crises to populism when he wrote “some degree of crisis in the old structure is a necessary precondition of populism.” Such crises can be about a breakdown of representation between elite and people, economic troubles, mass migration, social change, or even hard security threats. But crises do not simply exist “out there.” Their meaning needs to be narratively constructed: a crisis requires a story to be told (Moffitt, 2014). In its discursive understanding, populism becomes a mediator in that it makes crises accessible to audiences (Moffitt, 2014; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). By (re)framing an issue as a crisis, the populist can divide ‘the People’ from a threatening Other; pose as the only legitimate representative of ‘the People’ that is also able to lead; justify policy measures; greatly simplify and control the political agenda; and exert societal control by manipulating individual insecurities.

The past decade shows the remarkable effectiveness of populist crisis narratives, which were instrumental to the success of populist parties across Europe. Crucially, populist crisis narratives also seem to be effective at undercutting and opposing EU narratives that seek to make sense of collective insecurities like the Eurozone crisis, the migration crisis, or even the COVID pandemic. This chapter suggests that the concept of ontological security can be utilized to explain why populist crisis talk is so apt at capturing voter imagination. Crisis situations induce anxiety in the individual and remove the stability and predictability that the individual needs to feel ontologically secure, making the individual more receptive to the populist as the self-appointed source of security.

In contemporary European societies it is increasingly difficult for citizens to navigate the complexity of contemporary sociopolitical issues like European integration, changing demographics, autocratization, globalization, or climate change. It is also becoming increasingly trying to identify responsible actors that they can either blame or turn to with their concerns. The personalized, dramatized politics of populism offers a way to simplify this complexity by framing it as a crisis, and then showing a way out of anxiety and insecurity. It rallies citizens around a ‘Leader’ who promises clear-cut solutions, it highlights threats, victimizes their audience, and assigns blame. Crisis narratives are a special subset of populist narratives as they refer to existential threats, the need to act decisively and rapidly, and cosmic, Manichean struggles.

Borders and bordering policies enjoy a special significance in contemporary rightwing populist discourse through sovereignism. Sovereignism suggests a return to the traditional, territorial

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<sup>4</sup> Nationalist populist migration is commonly framed in terms of a collective threat (Bigo, 2002; Hogan & Haltinner, 2015; Huysmans & Buonfino, 2008; Krzyżanowski, 2020b, 2020a; Lutz, 2019; Ruzza, 2018; e.g. Watson, 2009). Research highlights that anti-immigration crisis talk shows remarkable similarities across regions and movements. The “transnational playbook” (Hogan & Haltinner, 2015) offers migrants as a particular Other: “freeloaders,” “parasites,” “terrorists,” and “criminals” are common tropes across these movements.



understanding of sovereignty, as well as the retrenchment to the national dimension (Basile & Mazzoleni, 2019). In this exclusive, territorial understanding of sovereignty, the “retaking” of borders in terms of their symbolic (i.e. representing the nation-state) and physical (e.g. border fences) form then becomes a marker of the nation-state’s redeemed sovereignty (Kallis, 2018, p. 298). The populist re-elaboration of sovereigntist claims then promote the restoration of border control to prevent migration flows, and ascribes the loss of said control to elites—both domestic and international—who made such borders porous and blurred, while promoting ineffective forms of transnational cooperation, such as the EU (Basile & Mazzoleni, 2019, p. 158).

Border control is also a crucial element of national security. In a traditional, territorial understanding of security, borders are the first line of defense against a multitude of threats, including migration. Border control is diffuse both in terms of its location and its tools, but political rhetoric essentializes border control to *physical* and *national* borders. The most visible manifestation of this logic are border walls and fences, which instantiate the security logic of borders in all their barbed-wire glory.<sup>5</sup>

Rightwing, nationalist populism is a complex mixture of populist and nationalist claims that frequently relies on sovereigntist tropes. Yet the logics of border security and nationalist interpretation of community and borders often clash where the territorial borders of the nation state do not overlap with the ethnonationalist interpretation of the national community (Merabishvili, 2020). Here, the reification of state borders as boundaries of the nation by definition excludes transborder kin-communities.

Territorial borders serve multiple functions for a state. First, they give a secure space to the community. Second, they delineate the sphere—both territorial and political—where popular determination can be exercised and protected. Third, they mark the contours of cultural and historical identities. And finally, they can be used to control movement in and out of the state (Kallis, 2018, p. 295). Yet in the Hungarian case, borders cannot serve the third role as they cut across a transborder nation that extends to the ethnic Hungarian kin-communities in neighboring states. In practice, borders in the Hungarian political discourse serve a dual role. On the one hand, borders are a site where homeland defense can be performed, most crucially against illegal migration. This performance is enhanced by the presence of a militarized border fence, which acts as a securitizing instrument, a tool that emphasizes the presence of both a looming threat and successful executive action against said threat (Szalai & Góbl, 2015). But on the other hand, borders appear as obstacles to national unification as they separate kin-communities from the community in the kin-state.

Contestation is inherent to both the security and the nationalist discourse. In the security discourse, contestation refers to outside threats to these borders, like migrants, organized crime networks, or hostile states. In the nationalist discourse, contestation refers to whether state borders can truly mark the contours of a national community. Yet in contemporary European politics, an open contestation of established state borders is no longer palatable. Rightwing nationalist populists like Viktor

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<sup>5</sup> Border protection and the securitized threat of migration are co-constitutive. Through increased border protection, crossing borders is criminalized, creating the category of illegal migrant, which is then used to justify stricter border control. Stricter border control practices in turn will increase the frequency of halted illegal crossings, but also make these more visible. These visible clashes between migrant and border will then in turn justify the existence and maintenance of strict policies. So in this sense, the “cause” of border control is created by border control itself. This self-fulfilling aspect of the logic of bordering renders it a flexible tool for populist Othering. Threats, security, and crisis can all be performed at the border.

Orbán, who address domestic and kin-community audiences in parallel, need to navigate this contradiction.

### **Kin-communities and securitized borders**

Security discourses often depict borders as hardened boundaries that act as the first and last line of defense against various threats. A border therefore needs to be protected and controlled at all costs. At the same time, transnationalism calls for national unification across borders, meaning that borders should become so porous that they cease to matter as dividing lines within the same “national space” (Scott, 2018). This apparent contradiction has been at the core of Hungarian political nationalism, which sought to unify Hungarian communities that were forcibly separated due to Hungary’s loss of territorial integrity in the 1920 Treaty of Trianon. The Treaty is framed as a national tragedy to this day, and some form of irredentism has been a key Hungarian foreign policy goal since the end of World War I, save for the Communist period.

The Orbán governments’ (1998–2002, 2010–) national unification project fits into the historical trend of “virtual irredentism” (Waterbury, 2006, p. 497) that eschews border change, predating Orbán’s populism. 2010 was a turning point Orbán’s kin-state politics as it marked the introduction of nonresident citizenship and voting rights, which suddenly multiplied the importance of mobilizing transborder Hungarians for domestic elections, and reinforced the governing party Fidesz’s central role in national reunification and the local life of kin-communities (Pogonyi, 2017; Stroschein, 2011; Waterbury, 2014). By granting nonresident citizenship and pouring funds into minority institutions across the border, Orbán’s Fidesz established itself as the representative of the unified Hungarian nation that transcends borders. Thus, kin-communities generally look towards Fidesz and its Prime Minister/chairman with a sense of gratitude and loyalty—made clearly visible through their overwhelming support for Orbán in national elections.<sup>6</sup>

2015 was yet another turning point in Orbán’s discourse on borders: Hungary became a transit country on the so-called Balkan route, and a (re)entry point into the Schengen zone.<sup>7</sup> The Orbán government quickly moved to frame the events as a crisis, and subjected Hungarians to a well-crafted and still ongoing anti-immigration campaign that securitized refugees. The securitization of migration in Hungary has been explored extensively in the past years, and research shows that the tropes this rhetoric relies on are largely imported from a worldwide anti-immigration discourse (Hogan & Haltinner, 2015; Watson, 2009), adjusted for the local context (Bíró-Nagy, 2021; N. Pap & Reményi, 2017; Szalai & Gőbl, 2015). The Hungarian narrative gradually moved along the three common axes of securitized migration, initially framing migrants as an economic threat, then as potential terrorists and criminals, and eventually as a threat to Hungarian culture and identity, wherein economic and hard security threats are directly derived from the alien culture of the migrant—they are violent and a burden *because* they are alien.

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<sup>6</sup> Kin-community Hungarians who hold dual citizenship can vote by mail. In the recent 2022 elections, 94 per cent of these votes went to Orbán’s Fidesz (Papp, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Most refugees already entered the Schengen zone through Greece, and according to the Dublin agreement Greece was supposed to register migrants and process asylum applications. With the Greek government failing to do so, refugees reentered the Schengen zone through Hungary, which re-invoked Dublin regulations.

Building on the success of the initial campaign, the government ordered the construction of a controversial fence along the Serbian-Hungarian border in September 2015. It also modified the penal code to criminalize illegal border crossings. But closed borders brought up the underlying tension between a security logic and the logic of transnationalism. If militarized borders are the only measure capable of defending Us (as the securitizing narrative suggests), then what about those Hungarians who end up on the other side of the fence, in Vojvodina (Serbia), or potentially in Transylvania?<sup>8</sup>

Though the border fence was symbolic in the construction of the threat of the Migrant Other, it also cut across kin-state and kin-communities. The way the securitization campaign was exported to kin-communities further reinforced this contradiction: the narrative both claimed that the Hungarian nation was united and under threat, and that the kin-community could only be defended by a border fence that *separates* the (trans)nation and reinforces borders. The border fence therefore needed to divide *and* unite at the same time.

Crucially, this manner of threat construction is not specific to the migration crisis. The securitization of refugees and migrants is also reflective of the workings of Orbán's semi-autocratic political regime, where the politics of fear attains an everyday status and is used for various policy purposes (Gerő et al., 2017; Kopper et al., 2020). Othering is constantly used to maintain uncertainty, mobilize the base, justify extreme measures, and depict the government as the only source of security. Fittingly, the Orbán government has constantly returned to the topic of migration since the campaign's launch in early 2015. The campaign was gradually expanded as the threats associated with mass migration were linked to further subjects, including EU bureaucrats, civil society actors critical of government corruption, the "Soros network," and even critical Western allies like Germany or the United States.

This method of threat construction is also a quintessential element of Orbán's crisis narratives and contributes to the creation of ontological insecurity. In the following section I will highlight how crisis narratives that carried the above extension of the subject of security—i.e., the threat, or, in populist parlance, elites and their proxies—were used to navigate the contradiction between the securitization discourse and the transnationalism discourse.

### **Navigating the contradiction:**

#### **Vertical othering, civilizationism, and borders in Orbán's rhetoric**

Narratives are crucial for the individual as sense-making devices that allow "conceptions of stable selfhood to be projected, even protected across time and space" (Steele & Homolar, 2019, p. 216). As such, narrative construction is crucial for establishing ontological security, but can also be used to promote ontological insecurity. Narratives strategically convey frames, which in turn serve three functions: they diagnose an event, or a problem that needs attention. They then offer a solution that specifies what needs to be done. Finally, they "circulate a motivational urgency to take action" (Aslanidis, 2015, p. 99).

Nationalist populism in particular disseminates narrative frames that diagnose problems in social reality due to 'corrupt elites.' The populist narrative's solution lies in the mobilization of 'the People' through

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<sup>8</sup> The Vojvodina region of Serbia is home to about 250,000 ethnic Hungarians, most of them living close to the border. The initial section of the militarized fence only covered the Serbian-Hungarian border and was later extended towards Croatia. Although currently there is no fence between Romania and Hungary, the erection of the border fence on the Serbian border also came with enhanced security all along Hungary's southern and eastern borders, and the government has repeatedly floated a potential extension towards the Romanian-Hungarian border.

the populist leader as the People's sole true representative. Constructing crises offers a stage where the leader-followers dynamic can be performed, the Leader's ability to act can be demonstrated, and the legitimacy of a personalistic regime can be reaffirmed. Such performances in the case of Hungary are widely mediatized, and due to the regime's hold over the media landscape, the narratives can be carefully tailored and delivered and dominate the political agenda in a relatively short amount of time (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013).<sup>9</sup>

Orbán relies on a populist style that includes bad manners, or at least transgressions against the traditions of mainstream political culture.<sup>10</sup> Especially when juxtaposing himself with elite Others (European elites, or "leftist-liberal elites"—domestic and foreign), Orbán emphasizes his own outsider status as a "street fighter," or "black sheep" of European politics. He creates unity with his supporters when framing them and himself as "underdogs" fighting a larger foe.

At the same time, his rhetoric also paints Hungarians as the embodiment of "true European values," rendering their popular Prime Minister the only possible choice for representing 'the People's voice' not just in Hungary, but across Europe. This discourse of maverick politics also establishes the Hungarian Prime Minister as an experienced and shrewd politician who has been in politics for four decades, and thereby differentiates him from both his domestic opponents and frequently changing European elites.

Crisis narratives are one of the most visible features of Orbán's discourse, and "crisis governance" has attained everyday status in his regime.<sup>11</sup> For instance, the origins of his regime in 2010 is also framed as a double-crisis narrative (the global financial crisis and a domestic political crisis) resulting in "a revolution in the voting booth." The Prime Minister regularly nests this foundational crisis, and every subsequent crisis, into a global crisis narrative about "the end of the modern West" that dates back to his time in opposition in the 2000s (Köröseyi et al., 2020). This "crisis of the West" narrative suggests that Hungary's geopolitical position has radically changed because Western institutions, most importantly the EU, are no longer able to deal with historical challenges (Orbán, 2013). Perhaps not surprisingly, this crisis narrative about a declining West is regularly used to justify problematic partnerships with autocracies like Russia or China, and depicts other Western or EU elites as decadent and ineffectual, and therefore dangerous.

The treatment of the "migration crisis" in 2015 perfectly exemplifies Orbán's crisis talk. By using the toolkit of anti-immigration campaigns (cf. Hogan & Haltinner, 2015; Watson, 2009), Orbán identified migrants and migration as a threat to the national security in Hungary, and simplified the complexity of

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<sup>9</sup> Orbán has a strong presence on social media, where his team posts short video messages and scripted "meetings with the people." His remarks are readily available online, his speeches on national holidays draw a huge crowd, and he maintains a constant presence on air through his weekly heavily scripted interviews on one of the national public radio channels. These faux interviews are very reminiscent of Hugo Chavez's *Aló Presidente* and are perhaps the best source of talking points for the whole media machinery. Meanwhile, Orbán's annual October 23 speeches on the anniversary of the failed 1956 revolution have been traditionally used to clearly define enemies. These two sources form the backbone of the empirics used in this analysis due to their reach and constructedness as performative stages for delivering messages and othering.

<sup>10</sup> Bad manners here refer to the use of colloquial, folksy metaphors and idioms, and the use of simple jokes. Vulgarity is reserved to his interpreters on lower echelons of his media empire. Thus, messages are delivered by the Prime Minister, but those get recontextualized for different audiences within and outside of Orbán's base.

<sup>11</sup> At the time of writing of this chapter, Hungary is the only EU state that has declared a national emergency in response to Russia's war on Ukraine. These national emergencies, like those of migration and the COVID pandemic, can be readily extended through Orbán's control of Parliament, and offer a wide-ranging set of tools to the executive in any policy matter, not just the subject of the emergency.

unfolding events through the use of metaphors and analogies to shape thinking in a particular way (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The tropes used are well-known: migration is a metaphorical “flood” that manifests in economic, hard security, and identity-based threats. Well before the Summer of 2015, media campaigns emphasized economic threats, and subsequently terrorism (Szalai & Góbl, 2015). By the end of 2015, the three types of threats were conflated: “Those who bring unregistered migrants from the Middle East (...) import terrorism, crime, antisemitism, and homophobia” (Orbán, 2016a). Migrants were thus clearly identified as a threatening other, with further negative attributions like “disrespectful,” “shifty,” “parasitic,” “deviant,” “anti-women,” “violent,” “lazy,” “lying,” and “ungrateful” (Szalai & Góbl, 2015). Migration represents a complex existential crisis as migrants threaten the Hungarian state (terrorism), and, due to assumed cultural and religious differences, are also ethnic homogeneity, and the “Hungarian national tradition.”

Commonly used metaphors like “flood” or “line of defense” were supported by analogies specific to the Hungarian historical experience. Migration was thus compared to the mass migration period of the early Middle Ages, calling the influx of refugees “a modern-day movement of peoples” that amounts to an “invasion.” This particular analogy triggers historical memories of 13<sup>th</sup> century Mongolian invasion of Hungary, as well as its occupation by the Ottoman Empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The analogy suggests that borders can never be fully protected, not even by the militarized fence. This comparison also highlights elements of collective narcissism in the Hungarian historical narrative (Forgas & Lantos, 2020), where Hungarians heroically guarded the borders of Christian Europe against pagan invasions, suffering occupations for their bravery while an ungrateful Europe stood by.

Within this discourse, Orbán securitizes not only Hungarians and their culture, but also their values—where the conservative values Fidesz and Orbán purportedly champion are conflated first with Hungarian values, and then with European values. These values are under a constant, existential, and often clandestine threat, requiring constant vigilance and unorthodox measures taken in their defense (crisis governance). Crisis talk and crisis governance then comes full circle, and maintains ontological insecurities, which demand further control measures.

This particular framing enabled the introduction of the aforementioned draconian legal measures to criminalize illegal border crossings, the introduction of a “national emergency,” and the rapid construction of the southern border fence. The fence clearly communicated the looming threat, and migrant groups camping at the fence were constantly featured on heavily edited news segments. Since millions of migrants exert constant pressure on Hungary’s borders, this war can never be decisively won, and each battle poses another, increasingly dangerous “win or lose everything” scenario, since “what we have seen so far was just the warmup” (Orbán, 2015b).

To navigate the aforementioned contradiction between securitized militarized state borders and Hungarian transnationalism, the crisis narratives relied on the border itself as a symbolic resource: the Prime Minister gradually established Otherness through a rhetorical frontier between the ‘real’ European people and their enemies. When talking about ‘the People,’ Orbán uses vague, but strongly positive attributions, and first-person plural with general adjectives: “Us, Hungarians,” “Us, Europeans,” “Us, Central Europeans.” Though the crisis narrative, Orbán sought to create an imaginary community within Hungary and Europe based on antagonistic frontiers.

Meanwhile, the location of the border fence at the external borders of the EU enabled Orbán to politicize its meaning within the EU context. Using sovereignist tropes, Hungary’s national sovereignty

was affirmed against a supranational European Union (“Brussels”) since at the time, multiple voices from Western Europe criticized the militarization of borders. Since 2015, the Hungarian approach to bordering has proliferated across the EU, yet this separation between “sensible policies” (Hungary) and “dangerous” or “naïve” approaches (EU) to migration and border control remains fixtures of the Hungarian discourse.

The narrative needed to combine two scales of the internal (national and European) flexibly, so that it could speak to different audiences while maintaining coherence between the two levels, and thereby resolve the contradictory dual symbology of borders (territorial state versus transnationalism). Note that it stages Orbán as a capable leader on both levels, and successfully establishes a bond between Hungarians and other Europeans through a civilizational rhetoric on the European level.

Enemies exist on both levels. European “left-liberal forces” for instance are incompetent accessories to the invasion or, later, actively complicit ideologues who, together with civil society actors of the “Soros network” in a “bizarre coalition” (Orbán, 2015c), seek to capitalize on the crisis in order to gain new voters, weaken Christian culture, and thereby dominate the EU (Merabishvili, 2020, pp. 59–60). These enemies are both responsible for the crisis and are antitheses of what Hungary through its ‘Leader’ represents. Orbán already marked “the European Left” and “financial and political power in Brussels” as the antagonist in 2015 (Orbán, 2015a). He claimed that “Brussels is unable to protect the people of Europe from the flood of illegal immigrants”—or even wants to weaken Hungarian national sovereignty. These elites fundamentally misunderstand what Europe stands for: “the nature of Europe resides in the fact that it is composed of nations; in other words, attempting to create a United States of Europe is a crazy idea” (ibid.).

In 2016, the Prime Minister reiterated his anti-elitism and sought to define the People at the European level when he stated, “the problem is that the crisis of the elite has now become a crisis of democracy. Large numbers of people clearly and spectacularly want something different from that which the traditional elite propose and are doing.” Accordingly, “Europe’s current political leadership has failed because the EU has lost its global role and has become a regional player, and is incapable of protecting its own citizens and its own external borders” (Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister, 2016).

From 2015 forward, Orbán has painted a picture of an EU that betrays its own Christian conservative roots and adopts a progressive ideological agenda, creating not only a security crisis at the borders, but also an internal identity crisis. These liberal ideas include multiculturalism, federalism, and more recently “gender ideology” (Kováts, 2020). They stand in stark opposition to the way of life of “true Europeans,” represented by Hungarians, through their ‘Leader.’ The EU’s goal is to force this ideology on the peoples of Europe. As sovereignty is the only defense against such a push, liberal EU elites also attack the sovereignty of nation-states. The Union thereby turns into a tyrannical “multicultural empire of mixed populations” that “*deliberately* failed to defend Europe from the migrant masses.” They seek “a Europe without nation states; an elite separated from its national roots; an alliance with multinational power groups; a coalition with financial speculators” (Orbán, 2018).

This empire metaphor invites the analogy of the failed 1956 uprising against the Soviet Union, which Orbán (2016b) has sought to emphasize regularly, most notably in his annual October 23 speeches commemorating the event:

In 1956... We were brave and attacked the Soviet tanks... In 1989 it was we who had to open our border, to let Germans find their way to other Germans. We were courageous and did this, despite the fact that Soviet forces were stationed here. And now,

in 2015–2016, it is we who have had to close our border to stop the flood of migration from the South. Not once did we request the task—it was the work of history and was brought on us by fate. All we have done is not run away and not back down—we have simply done our duty. We have continued to do our duty, even while being attacked from behind by those who we have in fact been protecting. We have the courage to face up to injustice, because on Hungarian soil injustice does excuse one from fulfilling one’s obligations; and therefore Europe can always count on us.

The 1956 analogy evokes nostalgia for a glorious past, when Hungarians fought as underdogs against oppression. It also helps to frame the issue of migration through collective narcissism (Forgas & Lantos, 2020) by invoking the *tragedy* of the failed uprising. Hungarians are ready to rise up against powerful empires, yet they have been repeatedly let down by those that they sought to protect. The analogy suggests that contemporary actions of the Hungarian government are aiding Europe but are once again misunderstood and misrepresented.

The only way to resist the pressure of empire and migration, Orbán (2016b) argues, is to maintain “the Hungarian way of life,” and to show strength to decadent elites and the misled peoples of Europe. The Manichaeic separation between two images of Europe puts the Hungarian PM into the middle of the battles over identity and policy on the European level. It frames him as the true representative of Europeans and Hungarians, the only choice when faced with the choice between a prosperous future or the chaos of multiculturalism. Orbán’s leadership embodies the values of ‘the People’ as well as their sovereignty, which are symbolically represented by state borders. Thus, to be free in Europe means to protect national sovereignty from incursions of migrants through state borders, and figurative liberal attacks (meaning any kind of criticism of Orbán’s policies). This stark contradistinction between ‘the true people’ and their enemies has framed Hungarian politics since at least 2015 and has been featured on all election campaigns.<sup>12</sup>

In such a complex, and permanent crisis, Orbán seemingly remains the only competent leader—on both the national and European levels—with solutions that work, like the border fence. He is the only one who can protect Hungarians from a dire fate and help steer Europe back to its moral roots. Despite representing the *de facto* elite for a decade, he can still paint himself as an outsider, a freedom fighter who is seen as a “black sheep” for rising up against “left-liberal elites.” Meanwhile, his “people,” be they domestic or foreign, are “underdogs” fighting a powerful foe. Thus Orbán’s logic comes full circle and circumvents the limitations of anti-elitism inherent to populism in power.

This civilizational discourse masterfully combines the insider-outsider horizontal antagonism of nationalism, and the people-elites antagonism of populism (Brubaker, 2017, 2020). Elites are not just economically insulated, but cosmopolitans who are culturally detached from ordinary people and “concerned with the rights and welfare of distant others,” favoring “a world without borders, regardless of its destructive effects on the bounded solidarities of nation and community” (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1192).

The crisis narrative is notably paradoxical as it simultaneously emphasizes and de-emphasizes borders. It emphasizes the external borders of Europe and highlights a threat, while promoting a Europe

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<sup>12</sup> Even though Russia’s war on Ukraine dominated the elections in 2022, Orbán’s problematic relationship with Putin, as well as his reluctance to condemn the aggression and support sanctions, were equally framed through the above antagonism: while misguided and corrupt European elites and their local proxies (i.e., the opposition) seek to bring Hungary into the war, Orbán wants peace and is the only possible mediator between East and West. Hence “not our war” became a campaign slogan.

based on nation-states as a solution to this threat. However, at the same time, the narrative also underplays Europe's internal borders in the sense that it projects an imagined, culturally homogeneous European 'We' against, on the one hand, the Migrant Other, and against ideologically distant European elites. The object of security is no longer Hungary alone, with its people and national identity, but European (Christian) civilization as a whole, including its many distinct nation states.

On this sovereigntist platform, common EU policies like the proposed and since abandoned relocation quota system could be opposed. Orbán suggested that the quota system comes from member states that allow refugees in and thereby "effectively fail to defend their country's borders." Instead, he wanted the common European policy to acknowledge that "everyone should defend their borders," and try to "relocate the problem outside of the territory of Europe" (Merabishvili, 2020, p. 60). Hence national borders became the site of contestation between Orbán's vision of a Europe of nation states, and the "liberal" vision of multiculturalist Europe that welcomes migrants and refugees. As a consequence, Hungary has become one of the strongest proponents of both strict border control and border control externalization towards Europe's new borderlands (Korkut et al., 2020).

## Conclusions

Jean Monnet famously remarked that Europe's history written in crisis, yet the contemporary elites of Europe are not the only one writing crisis narratives. The European Union has seen a plethora of populist actors successfully constructing crisis (counter)narratives that problematize the European liberal status quo and make sense of social, political, and economic troubles. This chapter illustrated how nationalist populists like Hungary's Viktor Orbán promote a particular kind of discourse that utilizes sovereigntist tropes to respatialize power, arguing that power has been gradually taken from the idealized community, threatening its wellbeing and even its existence. In this discourse, the territorial nation-state becomes the legitimate and familiar model of political community in a globalized, complex world. This kind logic also holds relevance even for the European Union through the narrative of "a Europe of nation states."

Borders are key element of both sovereigntism and nationalism. They define nationhood spatially. But they are more than physical constructs: they are also dynamically changing discursive entities. These discourses that produce the meaning and function of borders enable the introduction of various policies, ranging from stricter immigration laws to militarized borders. But the policies themselves also affect wider discourses on security, identity, and community.

Nationalist populist crisis performances utilize borders and other symbolic tools to instill ontological insecurity in audiences by painting an apocalyptic vision of imminent danger, while also framing the populist's policy agenda as the solution. But these narratives and the policies they enable often to not mitigate the problem at the root of individual anxieties—either because the populist is not in power, or because when in power, the narrative creation of crises is not aimed at solving problems like mass immigration or a pandemic. This chapter has illustrated this logic through the discourse of Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán. Through constant, interlinked crisis narratives, Orbán has successfully turned Hungarian politics into an arena of conflict. His rhetoric is ripe with calls for "battles" against a varied roster of enemies, and frequent allusions to historical memory of past wars of independence. He frequently uses war metaphors to describe problems and his own governance to convey a sense of politics-as-conflict. Such locution and historical analogies suggest that there can be no end to fighting, no possibility for



peace/balance with the Other. But without crisis, without war, there would be no need for the charismatic leader, either. This discourse on constant threat and crisis then facilitates the introduction of controversial policy measures framed as a unique “Hungarian national path.”

Orbán’s rhetoric is also illustrative of the different roles borders can play in populist, nationalist, and sovereignist discourses. Due to historical trauma, borders play a dual, contradictory role in Hungarian politics: on the one hand they are manifestations of territorial sovereignty where threats and crisis can be performed, but on the other hand they are also lines that divide a transnation. Hence, Orbán’s use of borders embedded in crisis talk needed and needs to navigate this contradiction. The evolution of this crisis talk perfectly illustrates how flexible a discourse populism can be. By reframing the threat as civilizational, by shifting Othering from migration to European elites, and by co-constructing ‘the people’ on the national and European levels, Orbán could successfully navigate the contradictory use of borders. He could address transborder kin-communities by underplaying the territorial division of the Hungarian transnation, and could thereby renegotiate national identities. Accordingly, Orbán’s politics—including the construction of borders—not only protects Hungarians, but European civilization itself. The protection of Hungarian territorial integrity is then integral to the protection of Europeans and ethnic Hungarians outside of Hungary, but is also a symbolic vehicle for promoting “a Europe of nation states.” Meanwhile, by turning migrants from a primary threat to a proxy of external elites, the Orbán government could also solve the issue of anti-elitism in power as the EU offered a readily available target for othering. Through frequent clashes with EU elites, crisis talk could be maintained and the ‘Leader’ could be depicted as an able politician who protects Hungary and Europe against all others, an example to others.

Orbán’s discourse on immigration has been a blueprint for politicizing issues in Hungarian and European politics. Constructed crisis situations and political myths depict the ‘Leader’ as the only source of security, and a sense of belonging is established among the audience. What makes the Hungarian case so interesting is that political spectacles, just like the aforementioned logic of threat construction, are a feature of everyday politics under the Fidesz government.

Crisis talk has enabled the transfer of the language of crisis and threat to new issues and actors, enabling their extreme politicization, even securitization. This was the case with migration, the Hungarian opposition, the “Soros network,” the EU, “gender ideology,” and more recently, the war in Ukraine. The combination of populist othering, crisis narratives, sovereignism, and nationalism has proven to be an extremely flexible discursive tool. The master frame of a declining West and an underdog Hungary protecting its own sovereignty could incorporate new enemies and threats—and it could thereby be employed to justify radical policy measures. Since the crisis is ongoing and seemingly never-ending, newer and newer measures need to be introduced which further propel Hungary down the road of de-democratization.

Viktor Orbán is Europe’s oldest populist-in-power by years spent in office. In the past decade he has fundamentally reshaped economic and political power relations Hungary, neutralized his opposition, and dismantled democratic institutions. Populist discourse is instrumental to his success, and, as the chapter has shown, it remains a flexible tool that can be utilized to impart ontological security on the electorate and solidify governmental hold on the state. For these reasons, Hungary remains a crucial laboratory case for the study of nationalist populism, crisis talk, the manipulation of ontological insecurities, and sovereignism.

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## Chapter 6

### **In the EU and Out of the Schengen Area: Bulgaria's Experience and Challenges in Securing the EU's External Border**

*Plamen Ralchev*

#### **Introduction**

Bulgaria as an EU member state is in a specific role being out of the Schengen Area, though committed to securing the external border of the EU in the Black Sea and the land border with Turkey. Since Turkey is of strategic importance for EU security by controlling (often even manipulating) the migration flow to the EU, Bulgaria's experience in maintaining relations and reaching agreements (both formal and informal) with Turkey represents a specific case, especially if compared to experience between Greece (also EU member) and Turkey, where frictions and tensions are severe (Karadağ, 2019).

As a country which fairly recently joined the EU and was a Warsaw Pact member during the Cold War vis-à-vis NATO allies Greece and Turkey, Bulgaria still perceives its southern border with Turkey as a "hard border" (Todorova, 2009). Despite geopolitical changes after the end of the Cold War and Bulgaria's accession to NATO in 2004, in Bulgarian common public discourse the Bulgarian-Turkish border is "*The Border*"—and probably the most secured border, somewhat the ultimate border of Europe. Partly because of the Cold War thinking, but also because of the historical account of relations with the Ottoman Empire, Bulgarians share a deep self-perception that they live on the borderland of Europe (Aretov, 2018).

It is because of these contextual factors pertinent to ontological security, border-thinking in Bulgaria has always permeated all levels of public and individual life: cognitive, identity-related, and material. The 2015 migration crisis just strengthened this line of thinking. So, probably unlike many other parts of the EU where border relaxation and border diffusion have been experienced in daily life over past decades, in Bulgaria the situation was different, and no comparable process of re-bordering as policies and thinking has occurred, since there were limited effects of de-bordering in Bulgaria after its accession to the EU, which primarily resulted in boosting relations with Greece and to a lesser extent—with Romania. Hence, foreign policy thinking in Bulgaria is largely affected by geopolitical and geo-economic concerns.

Migration is a highly politicized topic that is directly related to national security and national identity, as well as economic growth. Xenophobic anti-immigrant political discourse and hostile actions have intensified in recent years. The period of migrant/refugee crisis after 2014 was characterized by a migrational change and a political change. First of all, because of the huge migration pressure towards Europe, Bulgaria became more clearly aware of its role as an external border of the EU, situated at one of the entry points of migration from Syria and the Middle East to the EU, and part of the Balkan migration route. More significantly, there was a change in the political discourse, which framed the refugees not as a humanitarian but as a securitarian/security issue. The most profound change, which has invariably continued and is intensifying, regardless of the significant decrease in migration flows after 2017, is populist securitization and its adoption by mainstream parties (Krasteva, 2019).

Populist securitization is a conduit through which populist leaders formulate, execute, and justify their realist policymaking. The relevance of a populist government is anchored on the ability of its populist leader to convince the voters that the primary objective of his foreign policies is to secure the interests of the state and its citizens (Magcamit, 2017). Populist securitization is a specific symbiosis of leaders who are desperate to keep and execute power over society, and who feels uncertain about his future survival and is susceptible to any risks. Thus, populist securitization is a self-propelling mechanism.

Bearing in mind these contextual specifics, it is important to consider the role of the EU in Bulgaria's bordering practices. In the case of Bulgaria, the EU is a disciplinary agent with a mobilizing effect on both institutional performance and raising public awareness about the security of the EU's external borders. The Bulgarian public generally perceives the EU as a demanding actor and relies on the EU for policy judgement and endorsement. Therefore, Bulgarian governments intuitively keep measures taken in tune with the EU guidelines (if any) in order to prove and justify that Bulgaria is a loyal and diligent EU member state and duly contributes to the overall security of the Union.

This chapter includes an assessment of Bulgaria's institutional arrangement and capacity for handling border control and migration. My policy analysis will cover the period after 2015 when the first migration pressure was experienced in Bulgaria. Domestically, the "migration challenge" fuels the politics of fear and breeds a public mentality fixed on preserving the homogeneous national identity and collective survival (Amnesty International, 2013). Anti-migration rhetoric and tension turned up, including paramilitary voluntary groups organizing head-hunting of illegal border crossing migrants (Shikerova, 2021). Therefore, research also focuses on the aptitude for public communication, justification, and legitimation of policy measures taken. It is worth noting that anti-immigrant speaking in Bulgaria is not exclusively Islamophobic, since Bulgarians have a tradition of accommodating and coexisting with a large Muslim Turkish community (Zhelyazkova et al., 2010). Fears and concerns raised in anti-migration speech relate mainly to radical Islam like Wahhabism, and to the ethnic origins of migrants—Arab, Afghani, African, etc.

The analysis is based on data from official Bulgarian Ministry of Interior migration statistics, State Agency for Refugees, surveys conducted by the Bulgarian office of the International Organization of Migration, independent studies of NGOs and research reports (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2017).

### **Bulgarian experience with migration pressure**

Since the beginning of the civil war in Syria in 2011 and the start of the refugee crisis in 2013, Bulgaria has found itself to be one of the geographic forefronts facing the refugee flows because it is an external border of the EU, along with Turkey and Greece, on the land route to Europe (Cortinovis, 2021). In the period between August 2015 and March 2016, refugees and migrants used the so-called Balkan route to travel through Greece and Macedonia to Western Europe, passing through Bulgaria is an alternative route. In the current migration strategy of the country, the situation is illustrated as "a burden" of "mixed migration flow, including in its larger part asylum-seekers and irregular migrants" (*National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015-2020)*, 2015)

Bulgaria is predominantly a transit country due to several factors, including: the national policy, which puts a strong focus on securing the borders and on a zero-integration policy; the fact of being the

poorest country in the EU; the general intention of most of the asylum-seekers to reach countries like Germany, Sweden, and Western Europe in general; and the negative political discourse, and not least, the overall negative attitudes towards refugees from the local population. The overall dynamics on the European level (for example, the EU-Turkey deal from March 2016) and regional level (for example, the closed Western Balkan route in March 2016) give different nuances to the fluctuations and the intensity of flows, but do not change the transit character of the country (Krasteva, 2019).

Though Bulgaria has a relatively small refugee community, the levels of negative attitudes are high (Pachkova, 2016). Bulgaria's refugee dilemma is specified by the reality that very few refugees who receive refugee status stay in Bulgaria. The refugee community is characterized by a huge difference between the number of those who received international protection status, and the number of those who have settled in Bulgaria. For refugees, Bulgaria is and will continue to be a transit country. The reasons are complex, but two reasons are economic and political. Also, there is no effective and efficient policy of refugee integration nor a clear, consistent political will for its implementation. The paradox is that immigrants from previous periods in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are highly integrated in Bulgarian society even without proper integration policy. So, in the case of Bulgaria, the integration of immigrants has little to do with state integration policies (Pachkova, 2016).

The first governmental strategy on migration and integration was adopted only in 2008, two decades after the transition starting in 1989. This paradox is also reflected in the inability or lack of political will to brand integration and to better communicate and promote the need for integration along with positive examples and good practices. The obstacles to integration of migrants and refugees are varied. Perhaps most prominently is the intensifying xenophobic anti-immigrant discourse and behavior towards migrants and refugees. This discourse and behavior represents both refugees and migrants as a threat, not as subjects of humanitarian support and integration policy (Krasteva, 2018).

The xenophobic political rhetoric of many politicians, not just from extremist parties but also from mainstream parties, is also responsible for an increasingly hostile public opinion. Furthermore, they may be considered as factors inciting violence against migrants, and such phenomena as vigilant "migrant hunters" who detain migrants crossing borders—without legal authority to do so. The specificity of the Bulgarian case (which is similar to Hungary) must be underlined: anti-immigration discourses, politics, attitudes and actions are due neither to an increase in the number of migrants and refugees in the country—on the contrary, their absolute number and percentage of the population remain very low—nor to any negative experience of Bulgarian citizens, the overwhelming majority of whom do not even know any migrants/refugees (Pachkova, 2016). The political elites both from ruling and opposition parties bear responsibility for the increasingly negative environment, which undermines integration policies.

### **Difficult distinction between immigrants and refugees in Bulgaria**

There is no official data about the number of people granted refugee status who have remained in Bulgaria. In the unanimous opinion both of experts and of representatives of institutions, Bulgaria is not a final destination for refugees—the majority prefer to continue their migration journey to more developed Western countries, where often other members of their large families are waiting for them.



**Table 1. Top five asylum-seeker countries of origin (1 January 1993–31 December 2021)**

Afghanistan	36437
Syria	27837
Iraq	21271
Pakistan	3615
Stateless	2293

Source: [State Agency for Refugees](#)

In terms of country of origin, the profile of asylum-seekers in Bulgaria reflects the global refugee flows, in which the top three countries of origin are Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. There has been a certain change in refugee flows to Bulgaria in recent years: in 2015, the majority of asylum-seekers were Syrians who fled the military conflict in their country and who were granted international protection. After 2016 the largest share of international protection seekers in Bulgaria were citizens of Afghanistan, who “motivate their refugee history with socioeconomic factors.” It is important to note that the asylum-seekers from the top countries of origin—Afghans, Syrians, Iraqis, Pakistanis, and Palestinians—have immigrant communities in Bulgaria, which (except for Pakistanis) are also among the largest immigrant communities from the Near and Middle East in the country. In terms of gender, there are certain imbalances as well as specific characteristics of the different national groups and waves. While Syrian migration during the crisis was mostly made up of families, the post-crisis refugee flow is predominantly male: in 2018, women (6 percent) were outnumbered almost ten times by men (56 percent).

**Institutional arrangements**

The State Agency for Refugees (SAR) publishes monthly statistical reports on asylum applicants and main nationalities, as well as overall first instance decisions (State Agency for Refugees, 2021). Further information is shared with NGOs in the context of the National Coordination Mechanism. The Ministry of Interior also publishes monthly reports on the migration situation, which include figures on apprehension, capacity, and occupancy of reception centers (Ministry of the Interior, 2022). No institutional or practical arrangements or measures exist to ensure a differentiated approach to border control that gives access to the territory and protection for those who flee from war or persecution.

**Push backs at land borders**

Access of asylum-seekers to the territory of Bulgaria remained severely constrained in 2020. The Ministry of Interior reported that it had apprehended a total of 2,495 third-country nationals, out of which 2,184 were new arrivals:

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**Table 2. Irregular migrants apprehended in Bulgaria, 2016–2020**

<b>Apprehension</b>	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Irregular entry	4,600	743	689	489	510
Irregular exit	4,977	2,413	353	494	924
Irregular stay on the territory	9,267	1,801	1,809	1,201	2,053
<b>Total apprehensions</b>	<b>18,844</b>	<b>4,957</b>	<b>2,851</b>	<b>2,184</b>	<b>3,487</b>

Source: Ministry of Interior, Migration Statistics, December 2016: <http://bit.ly/2Fx9hIY>;

December 2017: <http://bit.ly/2ntEXaR>; December 2018: <https://bit.ly/2sBEJ4z>;

December 2019: <https://bit.ly/372jvz7>; December 2020: <https://bit.ly/3i01bgF>.

Asylum seekers and government officials have both long admitted that the border fence can easily be crossed (Daily, 2017) or by passing through damaged sections of the fence, which is a persisting and frequently reported problem (Mediapool, 2018). Despite the various full or partial lockdowns applied as a response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the new arrivals increased 60 percent in comparison to 2019 (Ministry of the Interior, 2022). However, Bulgaria traditionally experiences much lower numbers than neighboring Greece. This is due to the longstanding practice of the Bulgarian authorities to prevent Turkish nationals from accessing both the procedure (*Asylum Information Database/ European Council on Refugees and Exiles*, 2022) and international protection, and to return them back. In return, the Turkish authorities to a large extent divert the migratory pressure from the Bulgarian to the Greek border (Offnews, 3.03.2020). The latest example in this respect was the March 2020 border crisis in Pazarkule-Kastanies region (Mediapool, 2020), when the attempted entries to Bulgaria were close to zero.

Since 1 January 2017, the Ministry of Interior no longer discloses the number of prevented entries in its publicly available statistics. Thus, in 2020, only 296 asylum-seekers were able to apply for international protection at the national entry borders and only 1.4 percent of them (i.e., 15 individuals) had direct access to the asylum procedure without detention. The remaining 99 percent who were able to apply at entry borders were sent to the Ministry of Interior's pre-removal centers.

### **Border monitoring**

Under the 2010 tripartite Memorandum of Understanding between the Border Police, UNHCR, and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, with funding provided by UNHCR, all three parties have access to any national border or detention facility at land and air borders, including airport transit zones, without limitations on the number of monitoring visits. Access to these facilities is unannounced and granted without prior permission or conditions on time, frequency, or circumstances of the persons detained. Border monitoring visits along the Bulgarian-Turkish border are implemented minimum once a week at the Kapitan Andreevo, Elhovo, Bolyarovo, Sredets, and Malko Tarnovo border check points as well as at the Bulgarian-Greek border at Novo Selo. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee lawyers can interview the

detainees and also check the border registers. Monthly reports are prepared and shared internally. On their basis, the parties prepare and publish an annual border monitoring report (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2021).

In 2020, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee carried out 509 border monitoring visits at the border with Greece and Turkey, as well as at Sofia Airport transit hall. During these visits, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee can also obtain information from police records when needed to crosscheck individual statements, but has access only to border detention facilities, not to border crossing points *per se* (*Asylum Information Database/ European Council on Refugees and Exiles*, 2022).

**Table 3. Applications and granting of protection status at first instance, 2020**

	Applicants in 2020	Pending at end 2020	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection	Rejection	Refugee rate	Sub. Prot. rate	Rejection rate
<b>Total</b>	3,525	2,201	105	716	1,374	5%	33%	62%
<b>Breakdown by countries of origin of the total numbers</b>								
Afghanistan	1,736	1,125	3	7	858	0.2%	0.8%	99%
Syria	1,089	608	96	668	6	11%	88%	0.8%
Iraq	239	188	2	22	147	1%	13%	86%
Morocco	114	47	0	0	93	0%	0%	100%
Pakistan	85	42	1	1	55	2%	2%	96%
Iran	45	39	0	2	44	0%	4%	96%
Algeria	38	16	0	0	39	0%	0%	100%
Stateless	24	10	2	9	13	8%	38%	54%
Tunisia	9	12	0	0	6	0%	0%	100%
Egypt	10	—	0	0	8	0%	0%	100%

Source: State Agency for Refugees

**Table 4. Gender/age breakdown of the total number of applicants, 2020**

	Number	Percentage
<b>Total number of applicants</b>	3,525	100%
Men	3,161	90%
Women	364	10%
Children	1,125	32%
Unaccompanied children	799	22%

Source: State Agency for Refugees

**Table 5. Comparison between first instance and appeal decision rates, 2020**

	First instance		Appeal	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>Total number of decisions on merits</b>	2,195	100%	246	11%
Decisions granting international protection	821	38%	N/A	N/A
Rejection	1,374	62%	246	18%

Source: State Agency for Refugees

Bulgaria's re-bordering practices and narratives are deeply interconnected with European Union-level practices and narratives. By tracing the securitization and exclusion that they produce, the analysis reveals the institutional deficiencies and public communication distortions. Territorial, organizational and conceptual re-bordering of asylum-seekers in Bulgaria undermine the provision of protection, stipulated by international and supranational arrangements and shape public perceptions of threat, both physical and ontological, towards otherness and the foreign. The dynamics of (re-)bordering institutionalize the securitization and exclusion of asylum-seekers as a matter of national policy, but are also linked to practices and narratives at the European Union level and have EU-wide repercussions (Nancheva, 2016).

### Cooperation with Turkey and Greece

Besides the institutional aspects of migration policy, a special emphasis in the case study is to be placed on relations between Bulgaria and Turkey, the decision taken by the Bulgarian government for construction of a metal fence on the land border with Turkey and its safe-guarding, as well as the series of informal agreements and face-to-face communication between Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov and Turkish President Recep T. Erdoğan regarding migration pressure on Turkish-Bulgarian border. This specific type of bilateral arrangement eased the migration pressure on Turkish-Bulgarian border, diverting migration pressure to Turkish-Greek border (Deutsche Welle, 2020).

The case study also considers relations between Bulgaria and Greece with regard to cooperation in shared border control and prevention of illegal border crossings. These relations could be exemplified

as mainstream and streamlined, but they also face challenges as far as some internal Greek regulations are concerned. Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov maintains the position that there should be migrant registration centers outside the EU before allowing migrants in the EU and this coincides with the position of Greece.

Bulgarian PM Boyko Borisov announced at an EU summit in Brussels that migration pressure on Bulgaria is now coming from the Greek border (BNT News, 2018). In a similar vein, Bulgarian Defense Minister Krasimir Karakachanov has expressed Sofia's displeasure at Greek government plans to build a closed migrant center near the border between the two countries, saying that "it is absurd and it is not the act of a good neighbor." The comment came in reaction to a Greek government plan to build a facility in the northern region of Serres that would host migrants who entered the country illegally as of March 1, 2020 and are slated for immediate deportation (Ekathimerini, 2020).

However, despite this outburst, according to a Greek news website, the two countries are also still cooperating along the border region. The website *Greek Reporter.com* wrote that Greece had asked Bulgaria to open a dam located on the Evros river, which runs along the border region between Greece, Turkey, and Bulgaria, to cause intentional flooding and make it more difficult for migrants amassed at the Greece-Turkey border to cross the river. The governments of Bulgaria and Greece renewed their commitment to cooperation, which helped guarantee the stability of the two countries and the whole region.

Probably the most vociferous factor in Bulgaria shaping both political and public discourses on migration was Prime Minister Boyko Borisov during his term of office 2014–2021. His GERB party, affiliated with the European People's Party, echoed mainstream EU positions, and especially those of Angela Merkel's Germany. Though Borisov's consequent governments closely followed positions of Germany on migration, Borisov personally sought and pursued his own course of relations with the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been portrayed as a key factor controlling migration flow to Europe:

Brussels is far away, while Bulgaria is on the border with Turkey. There are almost four million refugees there and neither barriers, nor the army, nor any other measure would be able to stop migratory waves of hundreds of thousands of people (Milcheva, 2019).

With these words, Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov had invited "European colleagues" to be accommodating towards Turkish President Erdoğan, who had long threatened to reopen borders and denounce the 2016 Turkey-EU agreement on the management of the "Balkan route."

Bulgaria feels like the vulnerable periphery of the EU and strengthens border controls, even engaging military forces. The government has built a controversial barrier of over 200 kilometers on the Turkish border, which was completed in 2017. However, in the strategy of containing migration flows, Borisov's government top priority was always to build and maintain good relations with Erdoğan.

In addition to Borisov's diplomatic strategy, another factor could help keep migratory flows away from the border: the fame that Bulgaria has earned in the last few years of a country where "migrants are not welcome." Francesco Martino (2020) from the Balkans and Caucasus Observatory reports that, according to journalists present on the Greek-Turkish border, numerous migrants have declared that they want to avoid Bulgaria "because they will shoot at us with real bullets." In recent years there was a rise of

activities of paramilitary groups along the border, like the “Vasil Levski” military union or the “Civilian squads for the defense of women and the faith,” already authors of abuses and violence against illegal immigrants who had crossed the border—activities that the international media have widely emphasized, thus creating a climate of fear.

The general public in Bulgaria believes that the country was saved from mass migration of refugees from Turkey due to a personal agreement between Borisov and Erdoğan, which has been regularly renegotiated. For example, Borisov on several occasions joined Erdoğan in blaming the European Union for the collapse of the 2016 refugee deal, following rising tensions in Syria (RFE/RL, 2020b).

Borisov intervened in the acrimonious debate on migration by saying the EU must close its borders to those who do not use authorized checkpoints. Borisov made the call to the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union, COSAC, a joint conference of MEPS and MPs from the EU parliaments held 17–19 June 2018—during Bulgaria’s Presidency of the EU Council. The Prime Minister underlined Bulgaria’s efforts in securing the EU’s external border with Turkey: building a fence, mobilizing both army and navy resources, etc. In his words the migration pressure on the Bulgarian border for the past year-and-a-half had been zero as Bulgaria strictly adhered to its Schengen responsibilities. Borisov also presented the Presidency’s offer for a compromise text to the European Council on 28 June 2018: immediate prevention in the first place, followed by the closing of all external borders, with people being admitted only through the appropriate checkpoints. Countries such as Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, and Spain that are on the frontline of the migratory flows should be supported accordingly. People that are already in the EU should be integrated or otherwise sent back to their countries of origin. Borisov stressed that the free movement of people within the EU should not be threatened and that rules must be obeyed when crossing an external EU border. European diplomacy had to improve when dealing with the sources of migratory flows (*Minutes of the Meeting of the LIX COSAC*, 2018).

In Borisov’s opinion, migrants who were open to integration should be integrated, while the others should be sent back to their home countries. If this did not happen, the EU would risk more internal divisions, he warned. The hardened rhetoric on migrants and refugees came as EU member states quarreled over who should accept them—and as a growing number of migrants and refugees started using a new “Balkan route” through Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia to reach the EU (Dimitrov, 2018).

On 2 March 2020, Borisov met with Erdoğan and won some assurances from Turkey that Ankara “would honor its commitment not to allow migration pressure on Bulgaria.” The situation “remained calm” at the Bulgarian-Turkish border. Bulgaria has a 259-kilometer fence along its border with Turkey. Erdoğan accused the EU of having “double standards” and failing to comply with its commitments to Turkey on the migrant issue. The EU has previously dismissed such accusations as unfounded. It has financed the support of refugees on Turkish territory since 2016 with €6 billion.

Following the meeting between Turkey and Bulgaria, Erdoğan stated that “the Bulgarian position should set an example for all EU countries.” Erdoğan expressed his “satisfaction with the sound mindset of Bulgaria under the leadership of Boyko Borisov.” According to *Euractiv*, Borisov has “acted as Erdoğan’s advocate in the EU for many years.” Borisov thanked Erdoğan for continuing to respect the agreement “to curb illegal migration on the Bulgarian-Turkish border.” Bulgaria is the only country in the EU which automatically returns Turkish fugitives to Ankara (Gotev, 2020).

As unilateral measures, Bulgaria has tightened security along its border with Turkey to prevent an inflow of illegal migrants amid reports that Ankara may be relaxing its border controls to allow Syrian refugees to enter the European Union. “Forces have already been deployed at the border and measures to protect the maritime border have been intensified,” Borisov said at a 2020 governmental meeting. Bulgarian Defense Minister Krasimir Karakachanov said Sofia was ready to deploy up to 1,000 troops and 140 pieces of military equipment to the Turkish border to prevent illegal migrant inflows (RFE/RL, 2020a).

Karakachanov also stated in an interview with *Die Welt* that the EU must protect its external borders with arms to stop asylum-seekers from entering Europe. “We cannot allow illegal immigrants to come to Europe as a whole,” said Karakachanov, a member of the far-right United Patriots, the junior coalition partner in center-right Borisov’s government. “We should deploy NATO or EU forces in Italy and Greece and defend the external borders of the European Union by force of arms if necessary,” Karakachanov said he wanted to triple the number of troops stationed on his country’s border with Turkey to 600 soldiers from 140 to cut immigration further (Saaed, 2017).

The minister further expressed that according to their previous experiences, the soldiers are more effective at border security than police forces. Besides, he added, illegal migration movements will be monitored through security cameras and drones all along the border. In 2016, running for president, Karakachanov called for migrants to be stopped at the borders with “batons, tear gas, and water cannons” (Daily Sabah with agencies, 2017).

That type of rhetoric both resonates but also sparks public fears that possibly arriving crowds of migrants may severely deteriorate the social and economic situation in the country, and also may endanger its cultural homogeneity. Thus, nationalist and populist speculations raise the sensitivity of the public, arguing that the EU has left Bulgaria to self-help and that the country has to survive alone in a hostile environment. It is how negative public opinion has been nurtured against immigrants and defensive policy instruments (like the border fence, or the use of armed forces) have been justified. Unlike Hungary’s Victor Orban, Borisov didn’t want to sever relations with the EU and to play the scapegoat, instead seeking EU endorsement or the calibration of Bulgarian policies. The main reason for this course of action is that Borisov would like to keep the EU sources of funding, funding for external borders included. Therefore, he had to perform a complicated choreography with his coalition partner—the nationalist VMRO, and the EU partners. For Borisov, it was important to keep EU as an asset onboard Bulgarian politics, rather than making the EU a scapegoat for immediate domestic political reasons to satisfy nationalistic rhetoric and anti-EU pathos of some public opinion-leaders. By and large, this is not proper policymaking, as it distorts public and political discourses—but it is a formula for political survival of the then-Bulgarian government.

### **Public opinion framing**

The main parties fail to incite reflection and public discussion on the possible economic use of immigrants, nor do they seriously consider immigrants’ more innovative involvement in economic activity. Nationalist parties are increasingly advocating proposals and practices against immigrants (this also applies to other European countries). They actively participate in the initiation and organization of protests against immigrants in different regions of the country. They stimulate the people’s suspicion and even hatred

toward immigrants. This was the behavior in recent years of the so-called “patriotic” political subjects (IMRO, Ataka, and NFSB). In 2018 local elections, candidates for mayors and municipal councilors of IMRO, especially in Sofia, placed—as the center of their election campaigns—problems that immigrants create for the life of the local population in respective villages or neighborhoods (Pachkova, 2016).

Indeed, there is no big difference between Bulgarian politics and the EU’s influence as a factor in shaping public opinion. The Bulgarian government tries to defend Bulgarian national interests (avoiding or limiting the number of immigrants and refugees staying in Bulgaria and reducing the burden on social security spending) by appealing to the EU’s understanding and support to mitigate the problems caused by the influx of so many people in the country. Efforts to protect national interests, however, resort to palliative, ineffective measures to deal with migratory pressure, rather than coping with the serious reasons for such a situation. Bulgarian policy was in-line with the dominant pan-European policy in this regard, at least officially. Unofficially, there were many public speakers who blamed and criticized EU policy and expressed public disappointment with the EU (see Nikolov, 2019). The nationalists introduced another axis into the debate: the asymmetric responsibility of Bulgarian politicians to their home country and to the EU, with a definitive domination of the former (Krasteva, 2018).

There are two main directions of the government policy. The first direction is to reduce the flow of migrants to Bulgaria as far as their number is concerned. The second direction is to increase EU aid. The main objective of the government is to support Turkey and Greece as the external borders of Europe. The aim is that these countries take on a greater burden as far as admitting migrants is concerned, while fewer migrants enter the borders of Bulgaria. The aim is the fair distribution among particular EU states and help for poorer states (including Bulgaria). In 2018 then-Prime Minister Borisov launched an unspecified European role for himself as a mediator between the EU and Turkey, but this was largely for internal PR use. He even hoped to facilitate a trilateral meeting between Borisov, Erdoğan, and Mitsotakis, but he was disillusioned by both Turkey and Greece, and the supposedly trilateral format never happened (Martino, 2020).

More and more armed forces involvement in the fight against illegal migrants is planned. Border fences are built along the borders with Turkey to prevent illegal crossing. But in fact, very little work is being done against human traffickers who get rich off the backs of refugees. In other words, the ruling parties contribute to the prosperity of this branch of the informal economy in the country. Increasingly, large parts of the Bulgarian population make a living from this business (Pachkova, 2016).

The mood of most Bulgarians is a result of their real and justified economic fears, as well as the manipulative influences of various internal and external factors. They are characterized by a huge dose of selfishness and inhumanity, and an unwillingness to better know the causes of processes and trends. These Bulgarians uphold proposals for a temporary, partial, and palliative solution to the problems. The influence of other Bulgarians, who support promising but difficult-to-implement options for solving the problems, is negligible and there are no conditions for its significant increase in the near future. A significant reversal in the orientation of the Bulgarian ruling elite in this regard can hardly be expected. This would be associated with significant changes in Bulgaria’s domestic and foreign policy, which can only happen in different circumstances (Pachkova, 2016).



## EU and Bulgarian Approaches and Measures

The migration policy of Bulgaria has a strong security focus. Highly motivated to enter the Schengen agreement, the country's migration policy emphasizes building a fence, with the argument of securing the whole EU territory. The latest developments show that there are some positive steps in the normative basis on integration (e.g. *National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015-2020)*, 2015; the Ordinance on Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection adopted by the Government in July 2017; the Ministry of Education and Science's Ordinance No.3 on the Terms and Conditions on access to education of asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection that entered into power in April 2017). However, the implementation is still challenging, especially as none of the municipalities in the country expressed an interest in accepting refugees on their territory (Pachkova, 2016).

Being an external EU border, Bulgaria is interested in the adoption of a unified all-European approach and the identification of a solidarity-based solution to the problem. Relegating this all-European approach to the national level would result in an excessive burden for the countries of south, and above all of Southeast Europe, which are immediate neighbors of ultimate sources of the refugee crisis—the conflict in the Middle East and the Syrian crisis. Over the years Europe has developed and avails of a set of tools extensive enough (the Schengen Agreement, the Dublin Protocol, and readmission agreements with neighbor countries, including with Turkey), which seemed good enough for the regulation of migration processes. Post-2015 developments, however, have exposed a major deficit: the absence of an all-European policy conditioning a coherent implementation of available mechanisms. Facing the dilemma of accepting refugees or closing borders to them and attempting to strike the necessary balance between fundamental humanitarian principles of international law and preserving domestic stability and national security of EU member states, the EU for a long time has lapsed into *Zugzwang*, failing to find a useful move. On one hand, European traditions and values, international legislation on refugees, and the objective processes of globalization (rendering national borders an easily negotiated barrier for transfer of information, free communication and movement of capital and goods, and promoting human mobility) ruled out a simple ban or termination of migration processes. On the other hand, obviously no single national budget or social system could sustain the pressure of millions of migrants.

From this perspective, the pressure of the refugee wave on state administrations in the Balkans, which had to act immediately but were largely unprepared, inexperienced, and had low capacity for handling migration, was much more direct and heavier (especially along the Western Balkan route), while in Western Europe refugee and migration pressure affected intensely the host societies at large.

Kyuchukov (2016) argues that in Bulgaria latent fears are associated more with international terrorism, the importation of radical ideas from the outside and into moderate Muslim communities, the establishment and activation of Islamist terrorist cells in the region—and less so with concerns that refugees may come here to stay. He also points to the emergence of a “residual effect” of a sort: intensification of organized crime and corruption as during the period of war and embargo in former Yugoslavia. In other words, while Western Europe faces fears within (in terms of the foreigners that are already there, including those that have been there for decades), in the Balkans the threat is associated with those from outside (migrants who are still striving to enter). These conditions brought a certain consolidation of societies, as well as the strengthening of nationalisms on the Balkans—which, in turn, heightens the risk of secondary splitting of these very societies along ethnic and religious lines. The

reproduction of the two approaches to address the refugee crisis in Europe risks the propagation of new divides within Europe (Kyuchukov, 2016).

Kyuchukov (2016) also points at a paradox—both the facilitation of internal border-to-border transit of refugees, characterizing the approach of Greece, and, on the other hand, the construction of walls to forestall entry of refugees into a country's own territory, championed by Hungary first but subsequently adopted by other countries, have coinciding goals: passing on the problem to the neighbor—the one before or the one after us along the chain. This had several quite negative ramifications for the EU in the medium term: walls were put in place and internal dividing lines within the EU itself, between member states, emerged; the very fundamental European principles were put to test; the Schengen system found itself under enormous pressure resulting in temporary resumption of border checks by a number of countries; and the trends of having a Europe of different configurations and tiers grew stronger, in the end intensifying the risk of a long-term division between center and periphery. The debate on the future of Europe—towards deepening of integration or re-vesting national capitals with some policies—was compromised and immensely distorted by the political state of affairs—which would further impact the efficiency of decisions taken on specific issues.

The general attitudes in Bulgarian society are projected on to the attitude towards the policy of the government in connection with the refugee crisis—with the relevant amount of criticism typical of assessing actions of the governments of countries in general. As a whole, public statements on institutions are quite ridden with discrepancy, often not consistent enough, creating an impression that there is no fairly clear vision of the possibilities for a long-term solution to the problem. Having in mind the lack of unified and coordinated position of the EU on the issue, the inefficiency of proposed measures and approaches of Brussels, and the controversial signals of European capitals, the Bulgarian position fits within the general mainstream in Europe (Kyuchukov, 2016, pp. 14–18).

Despite the ambivalent and often contradictory verbalization of the political position on the part of state and governmental institutions, however, in practical terms Bulgaria tried to follow a line of action vis-à-vis the refugee crisis that has been predictable, adaptable, and pragmatic enough. Notwithstanding the numerous attempts to exploit the refugee crisis as an instrument for domestic policy ends, several consecutive Bulgarian governments after 2013 maintained in effect an implicit common philosophy (although never formulated clearly and explicitly enough, it could be labeled as “Prevent or Proceed,” i.e. either prevent entry or, if impossible, let migrants and refugees proceed further) with respect to one of the most complicated and controversial elements of the measures to tackle the crisis. The construction of a protective wall on the Bulgarian-Turkish border, which was initially met with serious disapproval in Europe, gradually turned into a unified approach to regulate the refugee crisis. As it was highlighted in the beginning, Bulgarians keep a special bearing of ‘The Border’ with Turkey and see their position as the border guards of Europe proper. It is important to note that Bulgaria was among the first to construct such facilities along the outer EU borders, without even being a Schengen member, but refused to do so along the intra-EU borders, i.e., along the Bulgarian-Greek border. This was consistent with the declared general approach for seeking all-European solutions versus an option where each country fends for itself (Kyuchukov, 2016, pp. 14–18).

From the standpoint of Bulgaria, migration pressure and the refugee crisis are major risks for national security because they may cause internal strife and social discontent, increased public spending on social security, policing, and housing, as well as extra burdens on state and local administrative

authorities, which generally have low institutional capacity and performance rate. Therefore, the readmission agreement between the EU and Turkey is seen as a remedy. The agreed transportation of registered refugees from Turkey to end-destination countries in the EU by air also would help alleviate the potential pressure on the land borders of the country. Bulgaria however failed to negotiate and achieve in the framework of the agreement a status similar to that granted to Greece. That would have meant a possibility for returning illegal refugees back to Turkey and providing the required material and financial European resources for the country if necessary. This could be explained with the weaker position of Bulgaria, being a relatively poor, non-Schengen, non-Eurozone member, with inept leadership and lack of internal support among member states.

Outside the specific measures for handling the refugee flow, the crisis brings Bulgaria to face several more long-term and fundamental questions related to the quality of the country's membership in the EU. In practical terms, first is the issue of Schengen membership. Regardless of the serious problems and disruptions that, according to many, question even the future existence of a single Schengen area, Bulgaria cannot afford to strike the insistence on joining the system from its agenda. Of course, there is some risk in terms of redirection of a part of the flow of refugees and, subsequently, the serious flow of migrants to Bulgaria, should Bulgaria and Romania join Schengen, by virtue of which entering Bulgarian territory would mean entering the single Schengen area. From this standpoint, at the current stage the situation where the country goes for a phased accession to Schengen, starting from its airspace and international airports on Bulgarian territory, would seem a more acceptable option. Such an approach has been publicly debated and informally proposed by Brussels on more than one occasion. The other major, even highly strategic issue relevant to the place of Bulgaria in the EU on a far more distant horizon is that the country should not allow its peripheral position in the EU to be institutionalized as a marginal or second-rank member because this may have serious repercussions on the domestic political development of the country, splitting even more and antagonizing gravely the pro- and anti-EU segments of society, namely those that may have ramifications for the EU integrity as a whole.

The crisis exposed many contradictions and unresolved matters within the European Union itself. It caused new dividing lines not only between “the old” and “the new” Europe; it spurred strong centrifugal trends at all levels of the European structure. What is also worrisome is the growing desire of several member states for a Union of different tiers and configurations—for the institutionalization of various formats and constitution of new power domains within the EU (around the Eurozone, Schengen, etc.). Given such developments, Bulgaria, falling in a disadvantaged position in the EU, runs the risk of getting into a highly adverse situation of a peripheral state burdened with serious responsibilities for the security and stability of the EU as its external border, yet constrained in terms of instruments and resources to fully deliver.

## **Conclusion**

The rates of illegal migration through Bulgaria remain relatively low, the impact of refugee crisis on Bulgarian society at this stage being primarily in political and psychological terms, while the actual pressure, including that which is economic and social, remains also low in comparison to a number of other European states, especially those from South and Southeast Europe. National opinion polls demonstrate that in Bulgaria the attitude towards refugees is ambivalent, being strongly susceptible to the

influence of public messages. The most important conclusion is that the Bulgarian society is charged with a number of fears with respect to the refugees. Most of the population believes that refugees represent a threat to the national security of Bulgaria by virtue of difficulties with integration, fear of foreign religion, ethnicity, and culture, but above all due to the concern that our state is in dire economic straits. The prevailing opinion is that the solution to the problem with refugees should be common for all countries within the EU.

As an external border of the EU, Bulgaria holds an utmost interest in the adoption of a single all-European approach and search for a solidarity-based resolution of the problem. Notwithstanding the ambivalent and often contradictory verbalization of the political stance of the country, in practical terms Bulgaria has adhered to a sufficiently consistent and pragmatic line of action vis-à-vis the refugee crisis. Bulgaria has no grounds for or interest in supporting the approach of the Visegrad Four countries and Austria for the so-called Plan B, providing for the construction of a protective anti-refugee wall along the northern borders of Greece, with Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia alongside. The agreement between the EU and Turkey reached in March 2016 marks the first consistent attempt on the part of Brussels to work out a more comprehensive vision to resolve the refugee crisis. As mentioned above, Bulgaria cannot afford to strike off its agenda the insistence on joining the Schengen system. At this stage a more acceptable option seems a step-by-step inclusion, starting from the airspace and international airports on the territory of Bulgaria.

Because Bulgaria is out of the Schengen Area, it is still a transit country not a destination country for migrants from the Middle East and Africa. The situation is changing in 2022, however, with the present refugee influx from Ukraine. Women and children fleeing the war and the Russian invasion in Ukraine have found safe haven in Bulgaria. Bulgarian businesses, private entities, and NGOs are cooperative and taking care of these refugees besides the efforts made by official authorities. Treatment differs substantially from the treatment of refugees and migrants in previous waves. Public attitudes acknowledge this difference. Yet, there are again public messages that the country is not prepared and unfit to host refugees and migrants as public funds are insufficient even for Bulgarian citizens in dire need.

Previous migration policy modes were either prevention or transit further westwards to the Schengen area (local organized crime is engaged in this as a proxy factor in human trafficking). It is considered a huge problem if migrants/refugees remain in Bulgaria, as the country has no or low institutional capacity for the integration or inclusion of foreigners. Maintaining closed-door centers, refugee camps, detention centers, etc., are all temporary and palliative solutions which may further aggravate problems. The only attempt for integration capacity-building remains with engaged international and domestic NGOs, which, however, also have limited institutional, material, and human capacity and serve mainly as committed whistleblowers.

What this chapter aims to recommend is improving institutional capacity for security and governance. A greater synergy is needed between different government agencies. The EU partners (via FRONTEX) should remain engaged and involved in the improvement of Bulgaria's capacity for the EU external border protection and management. National and local authorities need further capacity-building to differentiate between refugees and migrants, and provide adequate services to them. In order to counter the populist, nationalist, and xenophobic rhetoric outburst, there is a need for adequate public communications on this issue, since the mainstream political discourse frames refugees not as a humanitarian, but rather as a security issue. Despite the relative decrease of refugee pressure on Bulgarian

borders in the last few years, there is a persistent securitization of this issue for populist purposes and its upholding by different political parties.

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## Chapter 7

### **In-Securitization through Externalization? The EU and the Western Balkans “Borderlands”**

*Stefano Bianchini, Silvia Cittadini, and Marco Zoppi*

#### **Introduction**

The massive flows of migrants traversing the “Western Balkans”<sup>1</sup> region in the attempt to reach central and northern Europe in 2015 have impinged on a fragile context made of fragmented local societies, still dealing with unresolved issues connected to the legacy of war and violence in the 1990s as well as scarce experiences of effective regional cooperation ever since (Meka & Bianchini, 2020; Qorraj, 2018). Despite that, the region’s countries have cooperated among themselves and in with the EU in the face of migration along the Balkan Route for the management of the flows by improving border control capacities and exchanging information, ultimately reducing the unwanted mobility of migrants. In this way, they have contributed to the “securitization” of the entire region, in line with EU policies (Bogucewicz, 2020; Šelo Šabić, 2017; Tomic, 2017; Webb, 2020). In fact, the flows of migrants entering Europe from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries have represented a break in the existing European border regime, causing profound insecurity and political impasse, and subsequently triggering several different yet often coordinated reactions from both EU and non-EU member states.

For its part, the EU has, through the externalization process, pledged to increase the control of asylum-seekers and migrants at the fringes of Europe with the goal of preserving Schengen. Externalization has also contributed to making borders in the Western Balkans somewhat “thicker” via such measures as joint border patrols involving EU members’ police forces, and the provision of surveillance equipment and financial resources to establish and run refugee camps in the region. Through these and other measures, the Western Balkans have become a borderland within an asymmetric border regime that involves EU members and EU candidates, as well as Schengen and non-Schengen EU members.

The emergence of variable institutional “geometries,” and its implications, is often overlooked in extant research and requires new approaches. In particular, previous research has largely overlooked the impact of such a migration management system on security, broadly defined, in Western Balkan societies. This chapter thus aims to describe the recent dynamics of border management in the Western Balkans through the prism of ‘ontological (in)security,’ investigating the impact of the current EU migration management policies on the pre-existing border dynamics and societal tensions in the Western Balkans. As clarified in the introductory chapter, we consider ontological security as the sum of actions enacted by actors to safeguard the persistence of a sense of Self under uncertainty and threat. We apply the concept at a broad societal level, through available literature as well as reflections on the historical experience of the Balkan region. In this way, we aim to complement the study of ontological (in)security carried out in this volume with a specific regional point of view—to understand if participation in the EU-promoted migration management entails ultimately more security for the region, and in what sense.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors acknowledge that the expression is not neutral as it is used in EU official documents with a view on their accession to the Union.



We will argue that the consequences of practices and narratives of border control and migration management in the Western Balkans should be analyzed in conjunction with the specific regional perceptions of (in)security that are rooted in the recent past. Indeed, it is impossible to detach the impact of these flows from local feelings and understandings, from the societal representations of “borders,” “refugees,” and ethnocultural categories in the Western Balkans, which draw on the traumatic events of the past and which still contribute to the persistent relevance of narratives connected to security and nationalism (Hromadžić, 2020). Since Western Balkan countries joined this securitization scheme, not least to boost their EU credentials, their societies have experienced increasing insecurity due to their governments’ inaction and the lack of long-term strategies for migration management and integration. It is against this local context of perceptions regarding security that the question of the migration and integration of the thousands of asylum-seekers and “stranded” migrants estimated to be in the Western Balkans today should be assessed.

We show that the experiences of ontological insecurity in the Western Balkans can be connected directly to the EU’s actions, notably its unpredictability pertaining both to Western Balkans’ accession to the EU (*how long will it take?*) and the EU’s externalization of migration management (*for how long will migrants remain stranded in the Western Balkans? How will this impact regional societies?*). In order to come up with a meaningful analysis of a volatile concept such as (in)security, we have complemented our examination of official documents with the results of a qualitative online survey (questionnaire) that collected answers from 24 relevant selected actors during the second half of 2021 and early 2022. Questionnaires were aimed at collecting the perceptions of individuals professionally involved in the field of migration within the area, most notably International Organization (IO) and Non-Government Organization (NGO) officials, activists, and researchers—individuals familiar with ongoing migration debates and issues. While the evidence collected through the questionnaires has no ambition to be either representative or demonstrative, we consider it a valuable, qualitative contribution that helps reconnect theoretical considerations with the empirical concerns of relevant actors working in the region.

The survey aimed to investigate how the recent dynamics of border control have, in the views of these actors, affected perceptions of ontological (in)security in the Western Balkans among actors professionally involved in this area and field. Survey participants were asked to express their opinions on EU action in the Western Balkans and with respect to the cooperation or noncooperation between Western Balkans countries in the management of borders. In addition, four interviews were conducted by the authors in 2022 as a follow-up. Analysis of the survey and interviews reveals a number of issues concerning the EU’s externalization of border control in the Western Balkans and how this affects the perception of the EU and regional cooperation and integration in the region.

### **The historical and cultural background of ontological (in)security in the Balkans**

Historically, the Balkans, or better the Balkan-Danubian basin, have always been a crucial European peninsula of transit and interculturality. Not necessarily, and not always, these characteristics have been a source of insecurity and fear. On the contrary, they often produced cultural prosperity and an original syncretism that bridged the broader Central Europe with the Adriatic and Eastern Mediterranean space. For centuries, mixed populations and multi-ethnic cohabitation marked the everyday lives of villages and towns as well as the development of trade and communication infrastructures—even when the

geopolitical interests of great Empires and patrician republics clashed militarily. Rather, following a behavior common in Europe as a whole, the supremacy of one religious belief over others was often claimed, a goal to be achieved even with violence and discrimination.

By contrast, language, literature, cultural homogeneities, ethnonationalism, and the sense of belonging to a group played a marginal role in this framework. It is, however, true that controversial processes of state and nation-building, particularly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seriously altered this context by impacting regional stability and the security of populations. Trends toward modern integration and coexistence, developed since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by intellectuals and visionary policymakers (either with revolutionary or conservative ethics), were consequently challenged by confrontational ethnonational projects. The rivalries which followed marked the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in its efforts to redesign territories, languages, cultures, and memories.<sup>2</sup>

This process, aggravated by the ferocity of WWII, the bloody dismemberment of the Yugoslav federation in the 1990s, and the ethnic cleansing that was methodically pursued in a variety of forms, has generated far-reaching consequences for the geopolitical arrangement of Southeast Europe. Inescapably, the perception of ontological security, experienced by both individuals and collectivities such as states, was deeply affected. The peace treaties, which put an end to the Yugoslav successor wars between 1995 and 2001, did not establish the conditions for a stable psychological, emotional, and political framework in the region. The constant deferment of negotiations for EU membership, regardless of the assurances expressed at the 2003 Thessaloniki meeting, have aggravated local frustrations and the sense of marginalization in both the political and the public spheres. Not surprisingly, new suggestions to redefine, once again, state borders and the local balance of power have been asserted on different occasions within the Albanian cultural world, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in Bulgarian-Macedonian relations. During the Trump presidency, US diplomacy supported the idea of an ethnic-based exchange of territories between Serbia and Kosovo, despite the risk that similar requests could again upset the delicate regional stability. Furthermore, and consistent with these demands, an unofficial document elaborated in Slovenia and delivered to EU President Charles Michel in 2021 urged the EU to proceed further in order to conclude the Yugoslav partition, to the detriment of Bosniacs and North Macedonians.

It is indisputable, under these circumstances, that the regionally precarious institutional framework has an impact on the political self-awareness of states and the survival of their national identities (whatever “national” means in this context). Furthermore, despite Western proclamations according to which the administrative lines of demarcation should be elevated to international borders, bilateral agreements related to state borders are mostly unratified in order to avoid territorial controversies. The only exception is the border between Montenegro and Kosovo—but the current government in Pristina aims to reopen those negotiations. In addition, all the Western Balkan countries are deeply divided societies in terms of social and economic inequalities and religious beliefs, and in terms of nation and state-building culture.

This fragility is further exacerbated by memory revisionism. Disseminated by political leaders, local far-right movements, and the judicial manipulation of history, anticommunism here plays a key, disruptive role. The post-Yugoslav leaders (similarly to other post-socialist situations of Eastern Europe)

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<sup>2</sup> For example, World War I, the conflicts in Eastern Europe from 1917 to 1923, the related peace treaties, Hitler’s border revisions between 1938 and 1940, World War II, and the wars of Yugoslav succession.

are often infatuated by the need to erase the memory of the socialist experience as a whole. They perceive it as a “critical deviation” from the “natural” development of their countries, violently imposed by external players and/or local communist agents. While this is not the place to go into detail about the reasons that suggest such a controversial revisionist approach, it is important to note that by erasing the communist past the memory policy of the newly established states in the former Yugoslav cultural space unavoidably leads to political, social, and cultural contexts that have been dominated by collaborationists, Nazi supporters, their allies, and criminal perpetrators—including those who actively participated in the Holocaust. The emphasis on symbols and songs of the ustaša, the ethnic victimization of catholic Croatia in identification with the ustaša movement as well as the judicial rehabilitation of Draža Mihailović in Serbia (and the attempt to do the same in the Nedić case) are but a few examples of memory misrepresentation and manipulation. These stand in contrast to the antifascist political cultures nurtured in the democratic West and in the Soviet Union/Russia.

The cultural, emotional, and psychological dramas stemming from the debilitated readjustment of the state-building process after the 1990s wars have created political uncertainties and a societal sense of insecurity. The territorial changes imposed by the Yugoslav fragmentation also continue impact the practicalities of everyday life, such as diminished access to nearby public services or hospitals (because located beyond the new borders), or the loss of properties because occupied by families of other national groups. The political impact of such realities and memories is additionally affected by demographic changes, in particular those related to population aging and outgoing migration flows of younger generations. The miserable postwar socioeconomic conditions, marked by a high depopulation rate and intensive brain drain trend, seem to strengthen the autochthonous population’s level of unpreparedness to face the challenges of the future. It is against this complex backdrop that the newer issue of migration flows into Southeast Europe and its impact on ontological (in)security should be assessed.

### **Stability, (in)security, and control:**

#### **The Western Balkans’ ambivalent path towards EU membership**

The geopolitical region defined as the Western Balkans presently includes six countries which can be subdivided in “candidate” EU countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) and countries with “potential candidate” status (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo). Membership negotiations have begun only with Montenegro and Serbia; in the case of the former country, all the negotiating chapters have been opened, but only three have been “provisionally” closed. By contrast, eighteen chapters have been opened with the latter and only two closed. Albania and North Macedonia are still waiting to start negotiations, facing resistance primarily from France and Bulgaria, respectively. Bosnia and Herzegovina applied for membership in 2016 and sent the answers to the accession questionnaire in 2018. But the country has not yet been admitted to the screening phase. Kosovo, finally, has not yet sent an application for membership.

It should be noted that the EU enlargement process is traversing a phase of “fatigue” that can be attributed to both the EU’s internal challenges (think for example of the 2008 financial crisis, the rise of anti-EU populism, and Brexit) and Western Balkan states’ limited advancement in the areas of democratization and postwar reconciliation (Meka & Bianchini, 2020). In other words, despite promises, the road to EU integration is prospectively very long, and it is not certain that it can ever end positively. The contested decision of the June 2002 EU summit to postpone once again the recognition of the

candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the beginning of negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia has further irritated the regional leadership (including Croatia). Even the French proposal of mediation in the controversy between Bulgaria and North Macedonia has triggered sharp reactions and public protest in Skopje. By contrast, the EU summit recognized as candidate countries Ukraine, currently under invasion, and Moldova, whose borders are contested. Under this situation, a resort to violence in Southeast Europe is predictable if further border changes occur as a development (for example) of the Ukrainian war. In other words, European stability is increasingly affected by both external factors and contradictory domestic decisions where emotions tend to prevail over rationality.

This is important in explaining why security migration cooperation's impact on the EU enlargement process has been at best ambiguous: on the one hand, the need to manage migration has provided an opportunity for enhanced cooperation with Brussels; on the other, it has made clear the persistent, unaddressed political divisions between and within Western Balkan countries. However, the lack of EU commitment to developing a comprehensive enlargement strategy has several ramifications, among which it is worth underlining: (a) the controversies over the historical memories mentioned above; (b) the fragile ethnonational identities, which are often related to a past tainted by cooperation with Nazism; (c) the perception of borders as a protective wall against the local "other"; and (d) the awareness that the process of institutional fragmentation might proceed further.

The issue of enlargement nevertheless remains central for regional security since the EU keeps putting pressure on Western Balkan governments to improve migration control in order to meet its own security needs—and it has dangled the accession carrot when instrumental for this purpose. One clear result of the EU's growing interest in turning the Western Balkans into a more reliable partner for controlling and managing migration flows has been the externalization of border controls, namely the process through which the EU has increasingly demanded Western Balkan governments orient their border policies and practices in the direction desired by Brussels, linking this expectation to narratives of "merit-based" EU accession. This agenda has been pursued via direct financing of measures fostering control and containment of migration such as joint border patrols, reception centers and refugee camps, and emphases on security and border management in key EU Commission communications on enlargement (European Commission, 2021).

The EU, which represents the preferred destination of those on the move, has a strong interest in moving the border to its neighboring regions, even if this implies the establishment of "close camps" where the protection of human rights is not fully ensured. To a large extent such behavior stems from a deep internal political crisis in member states, which are unable to find a political compromise on the relocation mechanism for the redistribution of asylum-seekers (Bobić and Šantić, 2020). Member states are concerned about the future of their national identity, which they presume to be, or present as, under threat. In fact, the arrival of migrants has generated a vigorous internal debate around issues of identity and of the preservation of allegedly threatened European values, creating and exacerbating political cleavages within and among EU member states harboring different ideological positions, and between member states and the EU Commission. This can be explained by the fact that migration flows attempting to reach EU countries since late 2014 have been largely represented by media and rightwing political parties as a (ontological) security threat for member states and the EU—in particular by playing the card that migrants may compensate for European depopulation trends, and thus gradually making their traditions and habits predominant.

In response to these dynamics, the EU has tightened its policies and border controls and expanded its scope of action beyond EU external borders into the Western Balkans and Turkey (among others). Since 2015, the EU has increasingly attempted to close the Balkan route (with the EU-Turkey deal) and suppress the onward mobility of asylum-seekers and refugees stranded in the Western Balkans through various means, de facto drawing the region into its strategy for migration governance (Zoppi & Puleri, 2022). In doing so, however, the EU has externalized these complex issues to countries that are notably politically divided and that display weaker institutional capacities, as acknowledged by the EU Commission itself.

The current EU strategy of border externalization and migration management, focused on border controls and Europeanized asylum policies, has promoted in the Western Balkans a securitized model of migration management, which appears in the same form as that seen operating in other contexts in the Central Mediterranean route *in primis* (Moreno-Lax, 2018). It should be asked whether this securitized approach, which is rooted in intergovernmental coordination, will be capable of providing a blueprint for further cooperation with the EU and promoting broader reconciliation in the region—or if it will instead provide the impetus for additional tensions between and within Western Balkans countries, promoting additional perceptions of threat and fostering acute ontological insecurity in the long term. The growing presence of stranded migrants in the area and the lack of a long-term strategy for integrating both the migrants in these states and the Western Balkan countries in the EU certainly risks precipitating a further element of regional instability that may result in new and potentially disruptive forms of insecurity.

In addition to this, it should be noted that the current approach towards prioritizing border control and migration management reinforces a system that, in the name of stability, does not challenge the rise of semi-authoritarian regimes in the Western Balkans. Indeed, EU action in the area has been criticized for its complicity in supporting governments that do not fully respect democratic values but ensure external stability. This trend, named by some scholars “stabilitocracy” (Bieber, 2017), risks sacrificing real reconciliation and democratization in exchange for a temporary sense of stability and control in the region. As a result, in pursuing its goal of reinforcing external borders to contain migration, the EU becomes a partner of “stabilitocracy” because Brussels wants the stability of regional leaderships and institutions in charge of ensuring border controls and management.

### **Re-bordering and securitization processes in the Western Balkans since the emergence of the Balkan route**

In this section we explore how the process of re-bordering came about in the Western Balkans. Many of our survey questions refer to the context and the dynamics we describe below. In early summer 2015, governments allowed migrants and asylum-seekers to transit across the Balkans through a formalized “corridor” (Hameršak et al., 2020; Milan, 2019; Minca & Collins, 2021). The latter relied on two main pillars: the permissive policies announced by Austria, Germany, Sweden, and Serbia and the assumption that migrants desired to reach the EU and therefore considered all countries in between as mere transit zones. When this policy was revised, putting an end to the corridor, Central and Southeast European countries opted for the rapid closure of international borders, in a domino effect. Bulgaria and Hungary erected walls and fences to secure borders with Turkey and Serbia, respectively. North Macedonia sealed its border with Greece. Fences were also erected shortly after by Austria and Slovenia.

By the same token, the EU started transferring its migration control measures to neighboring countries, eventually turning the Balkans into “an EU borderland” (Beznec et al., 2016; Mitrović & Vilenica, 2019; Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2017). Important in this respect was the meeting held on 25 October 2015 between the EU and, among others, Albania, Croatia, North Macedonia, and Serbia (European Commission, 2015). Asylum and migration policies were thus made tighter by, for example, limiting the daily number of refugees allowed to cross or to apply for asylum in a given country. Or, as Croatia, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia did in November 2015, by allowing only Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans to cross their borders while denying transit to all others. In many countries, such as Austria, Croatia, Italy, and Slovenia, the police intensified border controls and implemented illegal pushbacks. Police from EU countries were sent to help patrol borders in North Macedonia. On 18 March 2016, the EU moved its external borders further east with the much-debated EU-Turkey statement (which implied the EU’s disbursement of €3 billion to support refugee control and management in Turkey) and by persuading NATO to deploy an operation in the Aegean.

Due to the increasing difficulties of crossing into Hungary, North Macedonia, and the eastern Croatian border, migrants began to enter Albania from Greece from the end of 2017 and then transit via Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Western Balkans as a whole was, by then, a region where many migrants found themselves involuntarily stranded due to the impossibility of travelling onwards (Galijaš, 2019; Vukcevic, 2020). As noted by Zaragoza-Cristiani (2017), “the Southeastern EU borderland is now made of a multiplicity of buffer states, each one fenced off by different types of fences and border control measures.” This has affected the perception of security in Western Balkan societies where migrants have become stranded. The EU provided financial support with, for example, €10 million “to help the [then] Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia improve its border and migration management systems in the context of the refugee crisis”—or the almost €100 million in humanitarian aid sent directly to Bosnia and Herzegovina, or through implementing partner organizations to address the immediate needs of refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants (European Commission, 2021; NEU, 2016).

Despite such support, perceptions of security in Western Balkan societies and among their governments were impacted by these dynamics. The different “geometries” also impacted the mutual relations between EU member states. For example, the Slovenian Minister of the Interior recently raised suspicions that Croatia is informally suggesting that migrants seek asylum in Slovenia by skipping Croatian territory from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite the formal Slovenian support of including Croatia within the Schengen agreement, this statement discreetly suggests that Croatia is behaving like Belarus did in the of summer 2021 vis the border with Poland. As noted above, what is perhaps most peculiar about the Western Balkans is that border narratives, practices, and even their participation in the broader EU migration control regime occur against the backdrop of inter- and intrastate tensions, scarce cooperation, and the unreconciled legacies described above. These unresolved matters, which notably include also border ratification issues, contribute on their own to the spread of “insecurity” in the region. The results of the questionnaire presented in the next section allow us to explore these processes further, underlining nuances and perceptions from a variety of actors involved in the region.

## **Analysis of the results of the qualitative questionnaires**

The questionnaire here presented and analyzed aimed to establish the (in)security perceptions of relevant stakeholders working in the Western Balkans region in the field of migration and/or border control. With this aim, the survey was prepared on an online platform and emailed to more than 140 selected contacts of persons living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia. These persons furthermore work in international organizations (IOM, UNHCR, OSCE), public authorities (government ministries, agencies, and institutions in charge of migration management and border control), or international and national NGOs, or are journalists or researchers working in the field. The questionnaire consisted of 39 questions mainly of close-ended type, but a few fields allowed participants to better express their thoughts on the topics touched upon by the survey, such as cooperation and cohesion in the Western Balkans; EU enlargement; and migration flows and their impact. The online survey remained open from the beginning of July 2021 to the end of February 2022 and collected a total of 24 completed questionnaires. Out of 24 respondents, seven live in North Macedonia, six in Bosnia and Herzegovina, three in Croatia, two in Serbia, two in Slovenia, one in Montenegro (three unknown). All but three respondents are citizens of Western Balkans countries: two are from Italy and one is from the United States. Most of the respondents work at international or national organizations/NGOs, four are University professors, two are researchers, and one is a journalist.

From February to April 2022, the questionnaire analysis was supported by four interviews conducted with key stakeholders. Two are based in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one representing an international NGO and the second being an independent researcher and activist. One is based in Serbia, working for a local NGO, and the fourth is based in North Macedonia and represents an international NGO. Three out of four have also answered the survey questions and were contacted to further investigate some aspects emerging from the written questionnaire with an online interview.

The analysis of the answers to the questionnaire and interviews highlights both a series of recurrent issues that are evidently perceived as significant in the current narratives and practices of border externalization, as well as a number of divergences, in particular in regard to different understandings of “security” and “cooperation.” The main issues that emerge and that are here presented concern the following topics: the geopolitical agency played by Western Balkans countries in the context of post-2015 migration; the impact of migration flows and their management on the relation between countries and with the EU; the action of the EU in this context; the impact of the presence of asylum-seekers in Western Balkan societies; the effectiveness of local integration policies; and the impact of border management on perceived security.

Regarding the geopolitical agency played by Western Balkan countries in the context of post-2015 migration management, the majority of the respondents believe that their own country does not have a role in decisions taken with regard to international migration. They do, however, seem to recognize the role played by the entire region in the management of migration towards the EU in terms of border externalization. This emerges especially in the answers of respondents working in North Macedonia, who acknowledge the importance of the country for the control of migration flows from Greece towards Western Europe, but state that national institutions do not play a role in decision-making at the international level. In the words of a researcher from the country:

North Macedonia acts as a fence for preventing those migrants or asylum-seekers to make secondary movements transiting through the country in order to reach other EU countries. Nevertheless, in this whole process the country has never had an important role in the decision-making process when it comes to taking big decisions. Despite the crucial importance that it has in the migration context acting as the so-called gatekeeper of the EU, however, it cannot influence the political processes within the European Union.

Regarding the impact of migration flows in the region, the perception that emerges in the answers of the respondents is that migrations do not negatively affect relations between the Western Balkans and the EU, while it might result in a deterioration of those with neighboring countries. As a respondent from Croatia put it: “While Croatia is doing the ‘dirty work’ of the EU by illegally deterring migrants, neighboring countries (Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro) are suffering the longer-term effect of our border policies.” In this regard, most of the respondents mention the practice of pushbacks from Croatia as one of the main issues affecting both relations within the region, as well as the lives of the affected migrants. Some connect the role played by Croatia in this context to its intention to enter the Schengen area:

Croatian accession to Schengen is seen as an ultimate goal that justifies pushbacks. Refugees are trying to pass Croatia as the last non-Schengen country in order to access the Schengen territory. But the route works in the opposite direction too: they are being readmitted from Schengen countries and then chain-pushed back from Croatia, out of EU territory.

Croatia has been in a situation of ‘blackmail’ for Schengen access: in order to be a favorable candidate for Schengen access, it had to prove it can ‘protect’ external EU border. Croatia decided to do it not with fences and walls, but with violence and torture perpetrated by state authorities.

At the same time, though, the responses to the questionnaires seem to suggest that, compared with other geopolitical issues affecting the region, the impact of migration flows on the relations between countries of the Western Balkans is not significant. According to the respondents, local governments are following EU guidance, but when this generates potential conflicts—as in the case of pushbacks from Croatia to Bosnia and Herzegovina—national institutions are not reacting loudly to avoid tensions with the EU. More generally, a number of respondents highlight the fact that the complex geopolitical context of the Western Balkans, also in relation to EU integration, is affected by a large number of issues, not necessarily related to the management of migration: “it is difficult to look at Serbia’s relationship to the EU only in terms of the refugee crisis, as there are so many other (potentially stronger) factors that impact their relationship with the EU.” As a consequence, the great majority of respondents do not believe that migration is affecting current political and public debates surrounding EU accession in their countries, suggesting that debates on other issues (such as the issue of Kosovo for Serbia) are more significant.

As one of the main factors affecting the management of migration in the region, the issue of pushbacks frequently emerges in the responses. For instance, when asked whether neighboring countries in the Western Balkans cooperate in the management of the migration crisis, some respondents raise a series of perplexities regarding what is meant by “cooperation.” Indeed, some argue that cooperation



between countries consists exclusively in conducting chain pushbacks and not in the management of an integrated approach to the issue of reception and integration: “it depends on what we mean by cooperation. Some of the countries of the so-called Western Balkans cooperated on conducting chain-pushbacks, from Italy to Bosnia-Herzegovina.” This issue emerges also when respondents are asked whether the migration flows improved the cooperation between neighboring countries in the Western Balkans. In this case too, the respondents express different opinions, although the majority suggest a deterioration in relations, mentioning pushbacks as the main issue: “There are continually pushbacks across borders in all directions—I would not call this cooperation. There is no plan in place to actually protect these peoples on the move.”

Concerning the impact of the management of migration flows on the relations with the EU and on the EU accession process, the majority of the respondents seems to agree that the EU and the Western Balkans countries are cooperating on the issue. On the one hand, Western Balkans countries apply EU regulations on the management of the flows. On the other hand, the EU is providing funds and knowhow for the development of border controls. Nevertheless, it is also suggested that this cooperation is limited to border controls and migration containment, while little or nothing is done to improve humanitarian support for migrants. In this sense, some respondents complain that EU funds are directed almost exclusively to higher-level national institutions to implement the externalization of EU borders, while little support is given to organizations working in the field. This seems to be in line with the securitization process that we described earlier.

Some of the respondents present the management of migration as a test for the institutional capacity of Western Balkans countries to manage complex situations and crises in view of EU accession. In this regard, a Macedonian respondent writes:

[North Macedonia] cooperates through the enlargement framework, whereby the country is obliged to adopt and to harmonize its national legislation to EU law. And this has already been done on several occasions, and the European Commission here plays a big role in determining the level of preparedness of the country for acquisition of the EU acquis.

Particularly interesting is what an Italian NGO officer with professional experience both in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina suggests regarding the management of migration by these two countries. According to her, the Serbian national government is taking advantage of the situation to improve relations with the EU and therefore its membership prospects, accepting all EU requests relating to migration management—including opening several reception centers in a relatively brief period of time. In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina is demonstrating (once more) institutional incapacity by not reacting at all or reacting very slowly to the humanitarian emergency. In her words: “I believe that the EU is using migration to see how Western Balkans countries are able to manage these kinds of issues. Serbia is passing the exam, Bosnia and Herzegovina is, in general, failing.” Concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina, though, it must be noted also that another interviewee highlights a general disillusionment in relation to its membership prospects. It is possible to assume, then, that this disillusionment might also affect the action of the local institutions.

Interestingly, while the great majority of the respondents consider cooperation between Western Balkans countries and the EU in the management of migration “important” and “very important,” they are also very critical towards EU action in this context. When asked how successful the EU is in dealing with migration challenges in the EU and at the pan-European level on a scale of 1 to 10, the answers vary from 1 to 8, but, significantly, two respondents answer 1 and five answer 2. Most respondents claim that EU action is incoherent: it breaks EU law itself, it does not protect the human rights of refugees and migrants, and it does not provide a clear perspective on asylum access. Provocatively, some claim that EU action is coherent in breaking EU law and in carrying out chain pushbacks: “Yes. [The] EU decides to break European law and this is exactly what happens at the external borders”; “Incoherent in access to asylum system and integration services, coherent in pushback and pullback practices at the external borders”; “It is very coherent in stopping people from moving and entering the EU.”

The questionnaire then asked to what extent and how the presence of asylum-seekers and refugees in the Balkans will impact these societies in the future at the economic, political, and social levels. Some respondents believe that migration flows will have some impact, although not necessarily in all areas: the economy is considered more affected, for instance, than politics. The answers highlight the fear that migration flows may reinforce the power and rhetoric of nationalist and xenophobic parties, which, in any case, have been present in the region since the 1990s wars: “They [migrants] are being used to build on the racist, nationalist narratives from the 90s”; “The political, economic, and social situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was not good even before migration crisis. [The] migration crisis made it worse.”

In addition, one of the respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina mentions the possibility that the management of migration flows may exacerbate preexisting internal divisions, in particular in between the Republic of Srpska and the Federation: “Political aspect—one entity of country denied any involvement in crisis, while NGOs are accused that are pushing migrants so called criminals in communities where the Muslims live. It is sad how some parties try to get points speaking about these people in such a wrong way.” On the other side, there is some hope that the arrival of migrants in the region may bring diversity into the Balkans societies, favoring more openness: “Politically it will unravel the fascistic and extreme parties, economically it could help perhaps fill in deficit professions and socially it will add the diversity making Croatia more ‘European’ and hopefully more tolerant to differences.”

However, the interviewees contacted for the study also highlight the fact that the potential impact of migration on future Western Balkans’ societies is significantly hindered by current asylum policies. The number of refugees receiving international protection in the region is still very limited and, despite the fact that increasing the number of asylum-seekers integrated in the country may represent an opportunity for these societies, the numbers are so low that it is not possible to estimate its real impact.

The great majority of the respondents think that their own country does not have a clear and effective strategy for the integration of asylum-seekers. In this context, the EU’s role is not considered so determinant. When asked whether they think their country gives more to the EU than it receives, the majority answered that the EU gives more, especially in terms of funds, as their countries have little to give. Nevertheless, the contribution of the EU is considered by some respondents to be insufficient, and, again, they criticize the lack of a long-term strategy: “EU funding has helped to provide these still not adequate accommodation places, and feed people more less partially any way. But that's not even close to a solution. After three years everyone is tired, and this issue is not interesting for any donor. EU financing UN agencies, but without other NGO it is not enough.”

This last criticism emerges also when asked if the support offered by the European Union is sufficient: the majority of the respondents claims that the EU provides support for border management and the containment of migrations flows, but little or nothing is done to support the integration of migrants and develop a strategy for the future. “[The] EU provided containment measures, no vision of what/how to do in the future”; “Yes, in the ‘border protection’ area. No, in access to asylum system and integration”; “In BiH, yes but it should have done more, namely to work on the integration and not to simultaneously support Croatian, Italian, and Slovenian border police to defend the borders.”

With regards to the management of borders in the Western Balkans and its impact on security since 2015, the survey asked respondents to indicate what kind of practices are carried out at the borders of their countries: all respondents indicated “pushbacks,”; twenty-two of them acknowledged “smuggling”; and seventeen “other violations of human rights.” Moreover, the majority of respondents indicate that the current border regime is fostering more insecurity, rather than security, both for citizens living close to the borders and the societies in general and, in particular, for migrants, who are deeply affected by pushbacks and human rights violations. One respondent connects these violations to the issue of contested borders: “as anywhere where there is possibility to interpret things accordingly, there will inevitably be more chances of conflict and disputes. In those areas, chaos and anarchy is often, which makes it easier to do illegal pushbacks.” According to another respondent, then: “smuggling activities would not occur in the first place, if the current border regime wouldn't make it impossible for people to move to their preferred destination.”

The interviews conducted during this study allowed us to collect some testimonies of the most dramatic consequences of the current border regime and migration management on the physical and psychological health of migrants. The NGO officer working in Serbia talked of the psychological consequences of being stranded in the Western Balkans for years when the planned trip was to last a few months. This happens especially to families with kids or to persons with disabilities because they have additional mobility difficulties, and to poorer families who cannot pay smugglers. Consequently, the current border regime affects more the most vulnerable segments of the migrant population, consistently increasing their precarity. The two interviewees currently working in Bosnia and Herzegovina highlight how the consequences of pushbacks from Croatia (both physical and psychological) are worsened by the lack of proper assistance from the Bosnian side, because of the general dire conditions of the health and welfare system in this country. This situation has led to the death of some and left permanent disabilities on others. Moreover, the multiple pushbacks, the lack of proper assistance and accommodation, and the total uncertainty for the future increase consistently the number of those with serious mental health problems—problems that will probably last past the end of their trip to Western Europe, hindering their capacity to integrate into the new society.

### **General analysis and conclusions**

This chapter has focused on the securitization process in the Western Balkans, especially since the mass migration flows in 2015. As described earlier, the six regional countries have engaged in intense cooperation with the EU aimed at limiting the mobility of people along the Balkan route. However, this has not necessarily translated into more security, especially in its ontological sense, for regional governments and their citizens. This has emerged also from the analysis of the questionnaires.

The respondents to our survey express a negative opinion in regards to the impact of EU border externalization on the relations between different Western Balkans countries. Most of the respondents, point out that Croatia, as a non-Schengen EU country, is interested in containing the entrance of migrants as much as possible. This results in a long series of pushbacks that increase the number of “stranded migrants” that Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia have to host and “manage.” In addition, as already highlighted above, while the practice of pushbacks is largely documented, the Slovenian Minister of the Interior has recently accused Croatia of transporting migrants to Slovenia’s borders. This example would confirm how the management of migration flows is increasingly politicized and might result in a worrisome deterioration in relations between Western Balkans countries.

Concerning the relations between Western Balkans countries and the EU, the respondents consider them as stable or even improved because of the enforced cooperation on border control. Nevertheless, EU action is criticized because the management of migration flows focuses exclusively on securitizing measures that do not provide long-term solutions for the integration of migrants in host societies. The EU is also criticized for violating migrants’ and refugees’ human rights, breaching its own values and laws. Most of the respondents believe that their countries do not have a role in decision-making, although they recognize the strategic importance of the region for border externalization. This perception might reveal a broader sense of “inferioritization” compared to the EU that, mingling with widely spread “victimization” discourses (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2015; Zdravković-Zonta, 2009), affects their national and regional perception of ontological (in)security.

In addition, it has been pointed out that relations between the EU and the region still mostly depend on a series of other issues connected to the history of instability and missed reconciliation in the region. These same issues seem to still dominate local public debate, which, according to the respondents, is only partially touched on by the issue of migration. In this context, respondents’ answers seem to confirm the fact that many of the problems that emerged after 2015 in relation to the events along the Balkan Route are not primarily the product of migration flows, but of old divisions that have resurfaced. Some respondents, indeed, expressed concerns regarding the possibility that the migration issue might be used to reinforce existing extreme-right narratives.

Local perceptions of EU and Schengen borders show also how the current border regime and migration management might strengthen old divergencies, mingling with national narratives, rather than foster reconciliation. Such perceptions are variable, depending on the different roles that the Western Balkans states play in migration management. The example of Croatia is clear: as an EU member working towards Schengen entry, it is called upon to play a “watchdog” role for the EU. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia must consequently manage thousands of “stranded migrants” following EU requests, despite increasing disillusionment regarding their prospects of EU membership. To this, it must be added that the presence of thousands of migrants, facing pushbacks and human rights violations, in countries with poor infrastructures and services, might favor disorders and feed racist and nationalist rhetoric. It does not come as a surprise, then, that the majority of respondents in our survey indicate the current border control regime produces more insecurity not only for migrants and asylum-seekers but also for the settled populations living in the border areas.

In sum, the analysis carried out in this chapter suggests that insecurity in the Western Balkans derives from a number of factors. In part, they can be summarized as the lack of multilevel joint efforts by regional governments to perform geopolitical agency and to act as “one.” They can also be summarized

as, in part, the EU's underestimation of the fact that security in the Western Balkans does not depend only on domestic fragilities, but also on the management of migration flows together with EU agencies. In fact, the six Western Balkans countries have mainly cooperated under the inputs received from Brussels on security matters, developing scarce ownership of policies and instruments to tackle migration challenges in the region. In doing so, the regional governments have been more oriented towards meeting the security needs of the EU rather than their own. And this has not helped the stabilization process in Western Balkans societies.

This approach could be linked in various ways to the “stabilitocracy” trend observed in the region, or to pressure exerted by the EU enlargement prospect—both may push regional political leadership towards convergence with EU politics, at least on paper. Significantly, this state of affairs depends also on historical tensions, which continue to generate divisions *between* and *within* states, preventing the formation of a common regional voice in European and international fora. The securitization of the Western Balkans borderlands is having, and will continue to have, important social, economic, and political impacts on the already fragile regional context, requiring a strong commitment from EU institutions.

The war in Ukraine has radically changed the context, however, particularly regarding Western Balkans states prospects for EU membership—on both sides. The 24 June 2022 EU summit confirmed that member states have lost interest in the region, deepening disillusionment, and further detaching Western Balkans' perspectives from those of the EU. Whether and to what extent these developments will affect the regional stability remains a crucial litmus test, not just for the region but for the EU as a whole.

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## Chapter 8

# EU Citizens, Free Movement, and Ontological (In)Security in the UK: Beyond National Citizens and Post-National Entrepreneurs?

*Owen Parker*

### Introduction

Migration and the free movement of people (FMoP) was undoubtedly a key factor in the Brexit vote (among others, see Evans & Mellon, 2019; Sobolewska & Ford, 2020). It has been widely suggested that the substantial migration increase that followed the New Labour government's 2004 decision to open labor markets to the then 'new' (so-called 'A8') member states precipitated a set of negative material outcomes for UK citizens that would become a key factor in the drift towards Brexit. This chapter suggests that such an argument overstates those negative material outcomes and understates the socially constructed and psychological nature of the anti-FMoP politics that became so prominent in the latter half of the 2000s. It draws on concepts from International Relations (IR) and security studies in order to trace the ways in which the FMoP was politicized. It points, more precisely, to the ways in which EU citizens were 'securitized' (Waever, 1996), particularly between 2007 and 2016, such that many British citizens came to regard inward EU migration and 'migrants' as an existential threat—or, in other words, as a threat to their own 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1984; Mitzen, 2006).

Such processes unfolded in different ways. The EU migrant was, most commonly, conveyed as a threat to the security of UK citizens in terms of the migrant's ability to access material resources that were purposefully—but usually erroneously—presented as being scarce: *inter alia*, physical space, housing, work, and welfare. At times such narratives were more transgressive: the EU migrant as noncitizen was 'racialized' and presented as threat to supposedly fundamental British values, civilization, and a 'way of life.' In arguing that such processes were not an inevitable function of material realities, but dependent upon the mobilization of narratives that effectively evoked subjective feelings of ontological insecurity, this chapter implicitly points to the possibility of an alternative future politics of migration (including, potentially, a future re-opening to FMoP in the United Kingdom).

However, in a decisive step, my chapter cautions against an approach that seeks to uncritically 'de-securitize' the politics of FMoP by returning us to an ostensibly 'normal' or 'liberal' politics, as conceived in the terms laid out by a Copenhagen school of security studies (Waever, 1995). Such a 'normal' can and has been associated with an ostensibly benign liberal politics. But such a politics often involves the championing of economically virtuous subjectivities and a concomitant castigation of the economically 'delinquent' (Parker, 2012a, 2012b). Such tendencies were apparent in New Labour's liberal policies on FMoP (roughly 2003–2007), which identified EU citizens, including A8 EU citizens, as 'good' economic migrants. Those policies formed part of a broader narrative that not only accepted, but actively embraced processes of rapid economic change and globalization (Giddens, 1998). Such a discourse welcomed, in particular, the 'entrepreneurial' or economically independent EU migrant, whether designated as 'low' or 'high' skilled. It broadly chimed with the EU's own (implicit) and

supposedly post-national or ‘post-Westphalian’ (Manners, 2002) accounts of what an ideal-typical mobile EU citizen could and should be (Parker, 2012a, 2012b). Notably, such discourses remained present on the Remain side of the debate—and among many EU citizens themselves—in the context of Brexit. However, as we show, these supposedly welcoming discourses are not without their own potential exclusions. In particular, the designation of the mobile independent ‘entrepreneur’ as ideal subject ushers into existence various alternative ‘Others’—particularly economically vulnerable or ‘dependent’ citizens, including migrants—and justifies ethically problematic policies of exclusion.

The case study is used to animate a critical engagement with both the aforementioned Copenhagen school of ‘securitization’ and an ‘ontological security’ literature in international relations scholarship. On the one hand, this chapter shows how those conceptual frameworks allow us to better understand the dynamics via which FMoP became a contentious issue in the United Kingdom despite its limited negative (indeed, mostly positive) material impacts. On the other hand, however, a pre-occupation with exclusions associated with sovereignty, nationalism, and territorial borders, can mean that alternative forms of possible exclusion are overlooked or de-politicized. Thus, in conceiving of an alternative *post*-national or *post*-Westphalian ‘ontologically secure’ subject and a concomitant sense of ‘home’ (Mitzen, 2018), it is argued that we should be sensitive to the alternative forms of exclusion that necessarily emerge (see also Parker & Rosamond, 2013). In our case, we point to the risk, explicitly or implicitly, of endorsing an ostensibly ‘normal’ or ‘(neo)-liberal’ politics, which is not without its own potential for problematic exclusions.

The chapter unfolds in four steps. First it considers the material impact of FMoP in the United Kingdom, pointing to the expert consensus that those impacts were largely positive. Second, it argues that the increasing concern with respect to FMoP was primarily a consequence of a securitizing narrative that convincingly presented EU citizens as threat to the ontological security of UK citizens. Third, it focuses on the alternative response to the anxiety and ontological insecurity precipitated by the ostensible ‘de-securitization’ of FMoP that can be associated with New Labour discourse between 2004 and 2007. Fourth, it considers the implications of our case for the securitization literature and work in international relations scholarship on ontological security. In accordance with recent literature, it points to the (normative) importance of not closing the ‘multifinality’ of possible responses to ontological insecurity (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). More specifically, it highlights the dangers of valorizing *both* the subjectivity of national citizen and post-national entrepreneur (or any other identity) as *fixed* or *definitive*. I illustrate how such an approach is normatively and politically important with reference to my case study.

### **The material impact of Free Movement of People in the UK**

Political scientists studying the politics of Brexit have convincingly demonstrated the central importance of the issue of FMoP in generating support for leaving the EU, particularly among conservative-minded voters predisposed to view the world through an ethnocentric or nationalist lens (Sobolewska & Ford, 2020; Evans & Mellon, 2019). The United Kingdom’s experience of FMoP was relatively uncontroversial until the 2004 enlargement of the EU. While EU nationals from the EU-15 were living and working in the United Kingdom prior to this time, the issue was, in general, not politically salient or controversial. But by the time of the 2016 EU membership referendum a significant majority (60 percent) of the UK’s population felt that the FMoP should be (further) limited in some way: only 36 percent said the United



Kingdom should remain in the EU without any new limits on FMoP and only 16 percent thought that the regime should remain as it was (Nardelli, 2015).

FMoP altered certain material realities in the United Kingdom. Net migration to the United Kingdom increased steadily from the late-1990s, and after 2004 the migration was driven increasingly (although not exclusively) by EU inward migration. This was a consequence of the New Labour government's decision to open the United Kingdom's relatively flexible domestic labor market to new member state nationals, or so-called 'A8' nationals (referring to the eight new states that joined the EU in 2004). Following the 2004 enlargement, far greater numbers of A8 citizens came to Britain than anticipated. As Geddes (Geddes, 2014) notes, "Home Office estimates put potential movement from new member states at between 5,000 and 13,000 a year, compared to an actual level of around 170,000 a year between 2004 and 2012" (the majority from Poland). Notably, the original estimates assumed that other large states (particularly Germany) would also immediately open their labor markets in 2004, but in the event most other states imposed 'transitional measures' (limiting access). Only Ireland and Sweden joined the United Kingdom in opening immediately. Subsequently, 2007's 'A2' enlargement (when Romania and Bulgaria joined) led to a further increase in net migration, although the citizens of those states initially faced restrictions as the UK government decided, this time, to impose the so-called 'transitory arrangements' that it had not done for A8 nationals. The fallout from the eurozone crisis in the period after 2010, particularly for southern European countries, coupled with the removal of free movement restrictions on A2 nationals at the end of 2013, again contributed to spikes in inward EU migration. As D'Angelo and Kofman (2018) note, between 2010 and 2014 UK national insurance registrations increased 172 percent among Spanish citizens, 151 percent among Italians, 137 percent among Portuguese and 243 percent among Greeks, with a total of 280,000 new arrivals from these countries. Between 2013 and 2017 the estimated total number of Romanians in the United Kingdom went from just over 100,000 to over 300,000. In 2015, just before the 2016 EU membership referendum, Britain experienced its highest levels of net migration on record.

In some local contexts, particularly those receiving significant and rapidly accelerating flows of EU migrants after 2004, there was local pressure on public services (and those areas would overwhelmingly vote 'Leave' in 2016). But macro-level evidence suggests that EU nationals in the United Kingdom were not a net 'burden' on public services but rather a net fiscal contributor (Dustmann & Frattini, 2014a, 2014b; Nardelli, 2015). There was also no reliable evidence of widespread 'benefit tourism' by EU nationals in the United Kingdom and EU nationals claim fewer benefits than UK nationals (Commission, 2013; Portes, 2016). While certain occupations and sectors may have experienced limited wage repression and labor market competition, the causal importance of migration was estimated to be, at most, extremely minimal (Migration Advisory Committee, 2014; Nickell & Saleheen, 2009) and there was less evidence of either phenomenon when considering only EU migration (Migration Advisory Committee, 2018; Wadsworth et al., 2016, pp. 7–6). These studies emphasized that migration increases the demand for labor—through the generation of new economic activity and jobs—as well as the supply and so wages will not necessarily fall because of migration, as was often assumed (indeed, they may even rise). It is notable that, following the 2016 EU referendum, even an advisor to former Prime Minister David Cameron acknowledged that, "we failed to find any evidence of communities under pressure ... *There was no hard evidence ... [I]t was clear that immigration is at best just one of several factors that are putting pressure on public services, along with globalization, deindustrialization, automation, and aging populations*" (Korski, 2016, emphasis added). In other words, while pro-market policies (and, after 2007, economic

austerity) had certainly impacted material wellbeing in the United Kingdom, there was no evidence that this was connected to EU migration.

Despite the lack of evidence, by 2016, concerns with respect to FMoP were widespread and not only among the conservatively predisposed voters long opposed to the regime. In the lead-up to the referendum, the UK population consistently over-estimated the number of EU nationals in the United Kingdom (Ipsos, 2016a, 2016b) and in surveys, respondents incorrectly linked their opposition to FMoP to a supposed competition for work, public services, and welfare. For the most part, such concerns were rooted in perception, not direct experience (Geddes, 2014, pp. 293–294). As Evans and Mellon (2019, p. 80) note, “the bulk of the evidence suggests that local experience of immigration accounts for only a small proportion of the variation in either attitudes toward immigration or its salience.” In other words, opposition to FMoP extended well beyond places that had been “touched by the kind of rapid and destabilizing population change brought about by immigration” (Geddes, 2014, p. 293).

It would be incorrect, in short, to suggest that negative public perceptions of FMoP were driven primarily or in any direct way by the material consequences of inward EU migration. As Balch and Balabanova (2016, p. 20) have highlighted, “research exploring causal linkages between institutional arrangements, socio-economic conditions and societal attitudes towards immigrants risks overlooking *the constructed and mediated nature of both ‘independent’ and ‘dependent’ variables.*” Certainly, the extent of negative attitudes to FMoP and to EU citizens in the United Kingdom owed a great deal to such *construction* and *mediation* by an ever-growing array of media and political actors.

### **The ‘securitization’ of EU citizens and the ontological (in)security of United Kingdom citizens**

International relations scholarship deploying the concept of securitization (Waeber, 1995) has long pointed to the ways in which mobile populations have been constructed as migrant ‘others’ and narrated by elites as existential threats to a national polity and/or to its citizens (Bigo, 2000; Huysmans, 2000). This is often done by self-serving politicians and their (media) allies seeking to detract from the structural causes of genuine material concerns (Bigo, 2002). That literature has emphasized how securitizing moves serve to justify the exclusion of non-national migrants from the realm of an ostensibly ‘normal’ or liberal domestic politics. Building on that work, more recent scholarship has explored the mechanisms via which such moves can impact the psychology—the ‘ontological security’ (Mitzen, 2006)—of those being described as under threat within securitizing narratives. It has illustrated a range of ways in which the securitization of non-national citizens serves to disrupt a national citizens’ sense of a coherent biographical narrative and a sense of ‘home.’ Indeed, the securitization of non-national ‘others’—often migrants— involves a usually purposeful attempt by elites to induce anxiety among citizens, both at an individual level and as an intersubjective collective (a collective that such discourses, of course, also serve to constitute and reify) (Kinnvall, 2004).

It is not easy to directly measure the causal effects of long-term political narratives on public attitudes and subjective feelings of (in)security and anxiety in the United Kingdom. But from survey-based empirical work, we can legitimately claim that public sentiment on FMoP/ EU citizens (and the EU more generally) was significantly influenced by both “media coverage and elite rhetoric” (Blinder, 2015, p. 96; see also Evans & Mellon, 2019; Foos & Bischof, 2022). As such, the securitizing narratives of prominent

media and political figures can be taken as an important proxy for the various subjective views of the substantial percentage of the British public that was either concerned about, or outright opposed to, freedom of movement by the time of the 2016 referendum. Moreover, based on earlier survey studies identifying resource competition and cultural difference as key factors driving opposition to migration in Britain (McLaren & Johnson, 2007), it is likely that narratives designed to trigger these particular concerns in relation to newly arrived EU citizens would have been effective.

EU citizens were already securitized in certain discourses post-2004. Unlike in some other national contexts, in the United Kingdom press they were, after 2004, increasingly described as EU ‘migrants’ rather than ‘citizens’ (Bruzelius et al., 2014) which established a clear association between EU nationals and various other (long-securitized) migrant groups. However, securitizing media narratives became especially prevalent in the period after 2007 in the context of the economic crisis and the A2 enlargement. Both the speed and scale of migration was increasingly presented in alarmist terms, via metaphors of war and natural disaster. The UK tabloid press invoked “floods, deluges, inundations, swamps, and streams, not to mention hordes and invasions, to describe the new arrivals from East Europe” (Fox et al., 2012, p. 686). In summer 2006, the tabloid *Daily Express* ran the headline ‘Get ready for the Romanian invasion’ (cited in Fox et al., 2012, p. 687, emphasis added).

Less dramatically, but perhaps even more effectively, EU migrants were erroneously (see previous section) presented as in competition with UK citizens for supposedly scarce or finite resources. These narratives were not the preserve of the Eurosceptic tabloid press. The upstart anti-EU UK Independence Party (UKIP) also pushed that message, realizing its importance in nurturing hard Eurosceptic sentiment. In its 2009 European Parliament election manifesto, UKIP (2009) stated that: “[o]ur membership of the European Union is already costing jobs in the United Kingdom. Major construction projects now hire many of their staff overseas, with British workers *not even having the opportunity to apply*.” Elsewhere, the idea of a competition for space and housing was articulated: the UKIP 2010 general election manifesto made the alarmist (but incorrect) claim that, “86 percent of new UK housing—or approximately 260 homes a day—is needed for immigrants. *By controlling immigration, large areas of British countryside will not need to be destroyed by house building*.” By the time of its 2014 European Parliament election electoral breakthrough, UKIP had warmed to the theme. One campaign poster featured the image of a begging construction worker sitting cross-legged on the pavement (see Image 1), with the caption: “EU policy at work. British workers are hit hard by unlimited cheap labor. Take back control of our country.” Another featured a finger pointing out towards the audience next to the words: “26 million people in Europe are looking for work. And whose jobs are they after?” Unveiling the posters, Nigel Farage claimed that, “[they] are a hard-hitting reflection of *reality as it is experienced by millions of British people struggling to earn a living outside the Westminster bubble*.” Summarizing the message further, a UKIP spokesperson said of the campaign, that: “It’s about how the EU impacts on our daily lives” (Channel 4 News, 2014, emphases added). UKIP proposed to control net migration, while repeatedly making the point that it would do so—and that any government could *only do so*—by ending FMoP (and therefore leaving the EU).

Image 1. UKIP 2014 election poster



UKIP's electoral success with these narratives had an important impact on the narratives and policies of other parties. Indeed, it is significant that these largely erroneous narratives came to be not only accepted but actively supported by political actors across the political spectrum. On taking office in 2010—as lead partner in a coalition with the Liberal Democrats—the Conservatives pledged to limit net migration to “the tens of thousands” and it reasserted that pledge in 2015. Mirroring the UKIP analysis of resource scarcity and competition, its 2015 manifesto stated that, “when immigration is out of control it puts pressure on schools, hospitals and transport; and it can cause social pressures if communities find it hard to integrate” (Conservative Party, 2015).

Acceptance of a resource competition narrative served to legitimate various policy initiatives after 2010. Social welfare was one area in which the Conservative government could performatively try to assert at least some measure of control (see Bigo, 2002). After 2013, the government introduced a raft of welfare reforms aimed at effectively discriminating—ostensibly within the parameters of EU rules on ‘non-discrimination’—against EU citizens. In a November 2013 *Financial Times* editorial entitled “Free movement within Europe needs to be less free,” Cameron set out his case: “It is time for a new settlement which recognizes that free movement is a central principle of the EU, but it cannot be a completely unqualified one.” Summarizing some of the reforms in uncompromising terms, Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, said, “You’ll have to wait three months and you’ll only be able to claim for three months. *Then it’s bye-bye*” (Woolf & Grimstone, 2014 in O’Brien, 2015, p. 114, emphasis added). In 2016, Cameron’s negotiations with the EU prior to the membership referendum doubled down on this reform agenda, seeking to further stretch the limits of an increasingly amenable (Barbulescu & Favell, 2019) EU law in aiming for a further toughening of the restrictions on EU migrants’ access to welfare and public services in the UK. Moreover, both in the aftermath of the post-2007 economic crisis (Neilan, 2010) and particularly following the Brexit referendum, the Conservative government sought to deport homeless EU migrants, at times in apparent contravention of the EU law to which it was still subject until 2020 (Townsend, 2017). All such policy moves aimed at ameliorating the supposed competition for scarce resources between UK citizens and non-citizens. But ultimately, as UKIP never tired of pointing out, these policies did not allow the government to assert direct control over who could and could not come to the United Kingdom from the rest of the EU.

Having accepted the resource competition narratives, those in the Conservative government that led the official Remain campaign in 2016 could hardly present FMoP in a positive light. Rather, it was

reduced to pointing to the Cameron renegotiations, while at once presenting free movement as a necessary evil to be endured in order to enjoy the broader economic benefits of EU membership (H.M. Government, 2016).

The main opposition Labour Party also gradually drifted away from its permissive approach to FMoP (described in the next section). In 2007 and again in 2009 Prime Minister Gordon Brown raised concerns pertaining to the use of ‘posted workers’ in the United Kingdom and the limited training of British workers. Although this was an issue relating to EU free movement of services, not people—and a relatively insignificant issue in terms of overall numbers of posted workers—the two issues were largely conflated in the public imagination. In that context Brown controversially deployed the slogan, “British jobs for British workers.” His policy emphasis was on training British workers and preventing EU firms from undercutting domestic wages. The Labour manifesto in 2010 broadened that focus, stating that, “[w]e understand people’s concerns about immigration—about whether it will undermine their wages or job prospects, or put pressure on public services or housing.” Under Ed Miliband’s post-2010 leadership, the party was, as Geddes (2014, p. 290) put it, “constantly apologizing for its [past] policies on migration and free movement” (see also Parker, 2017; Wintour, 2012). Implicitly endorsing the resource competition narrative, Miliband’s former pollster stated in 2015 that: “[traditional Labour] see no reason why citizens of other countries should have entitlements in the United Kingdom simply because they move here... They think Labour cannot comprehend these positions, let alone agree with them” (J. Morris, 2015). Labour’s post-2015 leader, Jeremy Corbyn, vacillated on the issue, both before and after the 2016 referendum. In more critical mode, like Brown, he conflated the aforementioned ‘posted workers’ issues with FMoP and in 2017 the Labour manifesto pledged to end FMoP. Those who continued to support FMoP—whether politicians, experts, or UK publics—were increasingly presented as out of touch in the context of the referendum campaign. As UKIP’s Farage—the privately educated former stockbroker—put it, the FMoP regime might benefit “the establishment” with their “cheaper nannies and chauffeurs, but it *isn’t in the best interests of ordinary British workers*” (The Express, 22 April 2016, cited in Virdee & McGeever, 2018, p. 1808, emphasis added).

The key point for current purposes is that the foregoing securitizing narratives focused on resource competition effectively presented EU ‘migrants’ as a threat to individual UK citizens’ ontological security such that, as noted in the previous section, a majority of UK citizens thought by 2016 that the FMoP regime at least needed radical reform. EU citizens were both presented and widely perceived as a threat to various taken-for-granted routines of ‘normal’ life related to work, pay and access to public services. They were in this way an anxiety-inducing threat to the certitude of life plans, or future individual biographies of self. In short, political actors were able to redirect the anxiety and anger precipitated by material woes away from the structural issues—*inter alia*, economic crisis and the ensuing austerity politics—that had caused them, and on to easily identifiable targets (Bigo, 2002, p. 69).

Concerns around resource competition were not the only trigger of ontological insecurity. Attempts were made to point to a less tangible cultural threat to a collective ontological security. In moves which ‘transgressed’ (Browning, 2019, p. 229) broadly economic liberal discourses, the propriety or behavior of new arrivals—in other words, their ability to *culturally integrate* with national citizens—was also questioned in some discourses and often in racist terms. As Fox et al. (2012, p. 688) highlight, there was a tendency in the Eurosceptic press to portray central and eastern European migrants, especially Romanians after 2007, “as dangerous criminals and social parasites preying on their well-meaning hosts.”

Two separate sensationalist stories of Romanian migrants allegedly cooking and eating swans, stolen from local parks, appeared in tabloid newspapers, *The Daily Mail* (7/8/2007) and *The Sun* (28/2/2008). The long-vilified Roma minority were frequently targeted by such narratives, and Romanians were often conflated with that minority population. As Fox et al. (2012, p. 689) note, “[l]inking migrants to the unsavory activities and cultural backwardness associated with the Roma (sometimes replete with allusions to the Roma’s purported Indian, or non-European, origins) [called] into question the migrants’ *civilizational* credentials.”

In its official communications UKIP was mostly measured in its use of language, apparently as part of a broader strategy to distance itself from the explicitly racist and electorally toxic rhetoric of the far-right, particularly the British Nationalist Party (BNP). For instance, its 2015 manifesto claimed that “immigration is *not about race*” (emphasis added), but rather, picking up the aforementioned overcrowding theme, “about space.” However, UKIP’s charismatic on-off leader, Nigel Farage, often transgressed into more controversial territory. Particularly after the 2014 ending of transitory measures with Romania and Bulgaria, Farage often emphasized cultural issues. In a 2014 speech he claimed that parts of Britain are “like a foreign land” and that, “in many parts of England you don’t hear English spoken any more” (Sparrow, 2014). In a radio interview of the same year, he pointed to supposed high levels of criminality among Romanian migrants in order to argue that, “any *normal and fair-minded* person would have a perfect right to be concerned if a group of Romanian people suddenly moved in next door” (The Guardian, 2014, emphasis added).

During the 2016 referendum campaign, Farage was even more forthright in stoking anxieties related to ostensible threats to a particular imaginary of British culture. Under the auspices of the unofficial *Leave.EU* campaign he unveiled the now-notorious ‘Breaking Point’ poster depicting a crowd of mainly Syrian migrants crossing the Croatia-Slovenia border in 2015. Drawing a problematic link with EU membership, the poster included the sub-heading, “[w]e must break free of the EU and take back control of our borders.” Such messaging was not, of course, about FMoP: the poster purposefully ignored the UK’s ability—as an EU member state that was not a party to the Schengen agreement—to ‘control’ the movements of so-called ‘third party nationals’ (including Syrians) into the United Kingdom. But by the time of the Brexit vote the link between migration and the EU had been so well established in the public’s imagination that the facts of the case hardly mattered. Even more importantly, and more significantly for current purposes, the poster explicitly racialized migrants. It played on anxieties related to cultural and racial diversity, including a long-cultivated fear of Muslims and Muslim culture (Croft, 2012). Such fears were also at least implicit in the media and Leave campaign messaging pointing (purposefully, but erroneously) to the imminent prospect of Turkish EU membership and a likely influx, under FMoP rules, of Turkish people into the United Kingdom (Morrison, 2019, p. 601).

Over the course of the 2016 referendum campaign, rates of reporting on immigration tripled and that reporting was largely negative, particularly in *The Express*, *The Daily Mail*, and *The Sun* (Moore & Ramsay, 2017). Both the aforementioned scarcity and racializing narratives were once again prevalent with reference to Eastern European migrants, leading the Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (2016) to criticize the British tabloid newspapers for their ‘offensive, discriminatory and provocative terminology’ (Rzepnikowska, 2019, p. 66). As Virdee and McGeever (2018, p. 1807) have noted:

regimes of representation that portrayed migrants as the bearers of alien customs and practices were sufficient to place them beyond the boundary of what it meant to be British. In these neo-racisms, culture takes the place of pseudo-biology, but secures the same intended outcome of generating public support for the permanent exclusion of migrants from membership of the imagined national community.

At least some British citizens clearly identified with, and/or were influenced by, these more transgressive ‘neo-racist’ narratives. In the weeks after June 2016 there was a notable increased incidence of verbal and sometimes physical abuse targeted at EU citizens (Corcoran et al., 2016, pp. 1, 18).

In ontological security terms, these transgressive narratives presented EU migrants as a threat not only to individual routines associated with work and social citizenship, but to something more collective, more fundamental and at once inchoate: a sense of home-as-nation and an associated culture or ‘way of life.’ According to these neo-racist securitizing narratives the threatened home was conceived as exclusively English-speaking and usually white British, while a much-revered ‘way of life’ was at once (and without irony) presented as irrevocably too ‘civilized’ for the new arrivals.

### **The ‘de-securitization’ of EU citizens**

Long before these securitizing narratives focused on EU citizens and FMoP, negative discourses pertaining to migration more generally had been a feature of UK politics, with variable salience and impact over time. The wave of Commonwealth migration in the 1950s and 1960s generated a similar set of securitizing narratives which, in turn, led to policies that removed citizenship rights from such migrants. The issue again became politically salient between the late 1990s and early 2000s (Evans & Mellon, 2019). But in all such political periods there were always opposition voices of resistance that sought to defy the logic of threat and securitization—they sought to *de*-securitize the issue (Waeber, 1995)—by emphasizing the benefits of immigration, the contributions of migrants, and arguing in favor of a multicultural and diverse Britain. De-securitization can take various forms, but it usually involves moves to return a securitized issue or group into the realm of an ostensibly ‘normal’ liberal politics via a “reworking of the friend-enemy distinction” (Hansen, 2012, p. 546).

Concretely, in our case such de-securitization would mean the designation of EU nationals as ‘citizens,’ worthy and deserving of the same treatment as UK citizens. This was largely the situation pre-2004, when the salience of the issue was low and equal treatment rules largely unquestioned. However, following the A8 enlargement the New Labour government had to actively legitimate the continued treatment of FMoP within the realm of a normal politics in the face of incipient efforts by Eurosceptic actors to securitize the issue (as discussed in the preceding section). In ontological security terms this meant persuading UK citizens to psychologically conceive of their collective national ‘home’ as open to new EU citizens and, ideally, at once conceive of a notion of collective ‘home’ (Mitzen, 2018) beyond the narrow imaginary of nation-state. This endeavor aligned with EU principles and laws underpinning FMoP, which (subject to conditionality discussed below) required nondiscrimination toward EU citizens by member states. More broadly, it accorded with a post-Westphalian or cosmopolitan conception of EU citizenship, which was prominently championed by the EU itself after the Maastricht Treaty.

Thus, while Tony Blair's New Labour government was not blind to the enduring salience of migration when it took office for the first time, it adopted very different positions in relation to different 'types' of migration (Mulvey, 2011). As Flynn (Flynn, 2003, p. 1) noted, "since the election ... in 1997 it has appeared to many that immigration policy has acquired two separate souls—one harshly repressive, the other liberal and progressive." The repressive aspect related, in particular, to the figure of the 'bogus asylum-seeker': indeed, a securitizing language and exclusive set of policies prevailed in relation to all groups designated as 'illegal' migrants (Mulvey, 2011). Of more significance for current purposes, the government was supposedly 'liberal and progressive' with respect to so-called economic migration, and it understood intra-EU FMoP very much in those terms. As the 2004 enlargement approached, Labour maintained that Polish and other migrants from new (A8) member states would fill important gaps in UK labor markets and contribute to economic growth. The government's permissive policy towards free movement formed part of its broader 'managed migration' agenda (Home Office, 2002).

Some scholars have linked that permissiveness to the demands of interest groups—particularly employer and business actors—for migrant labor (Somerville & Goodman, 2010; Menz, 2008). Others have emphasized, rather, the importance of elite ideology and in particular, New Labour's 'third way' (Giddens, 1998) embrace of 'modernization' and globalization (Consterdine, 2015; Statham & Geddes, 2006; Flynn, 2003). Drawing such analyses together, we can say that a set of broadly pro-market ideas informed New Labour's presentation of economic migration and these generally cohered with the immediate needs of UK labor markets and the pragmatic business interests inhabiting those markets at the turn of the century. Thus, from the early 2000s until at least the 2007 global financial crisis, the New Labour government aimed to represent FMoP not as a threat to, but as a source of, British citizens' wellbeing and, albeit implicitly, their ontological security. As Blair put in a speech to the CBI, shortly before the 2004 enlargement, the government's migration strategy, was built on, "[a] recognition of the benefits that controlled migration brings *not just to the economy but to delivering the public and private services on which we rely*" ("Full Text," 2004, emphasis added). Similarly, after 2004 New Labour was keen to reassure the public that the larger than expected migratory flows from A8 countries were not a cause for concern; on the contrary they would help to reinforce the country's economic security and thereby improve and 'modernize' the collective 'home' and enhance the individual security of British citizens. In line with such economic arguments, New Labour refused, unlike the later Cameron government, to tie itself to limits on overall net migration, allowing the (labor) market to dictate numbers. In short, EU citizens were considered primarily as labor migrants: mobile and independent 'entrepreneurial' subjects (Foucault, 2008) contributing to the collective wealth of the (British) nation. And such a view was reflected in at least some of the media coverage immediately after 2004, which, "focused on the positive work ethics of Polish migrants by emphasizing hard-working-ness, value for money and diligence" (Rzepnikowska, 2019, p. 66).

However, viewing migration and migrants through a broadly neoliberal lens had implications for both EU and UK citizens in Britain who were not able to 'successfully' assume this ideal subjectivity of neoliberal government. The definition of 'success' in this context has been a rather elastic one, but for New Labour at least that definition would, with respect to EU citizens, include not only those working in ostensibly 'high skilled' jobs, but the many thousands of EU citizens in ostensibly 'low-skilled' work (where many labor gaps existed in the early 2000s). The 'Other' of such a discourse was those UK and EU citizens unable to be 'self-sufficient': often those claiming social welfare of one form or another and therefore regarded as unable to 'contribute' to the collective economic endeavor. Even in a broader



context of celebrating certain EU citizens, non-nationals EU citizens in such a precarious position encountered the most punitive treatment. It is notable in this respect that long before the Conservative government enacted its aforementioned policies aimed at delimiting the welfare entitlements of (or even deporting) economically ‘delinquent’ EU citizens, the New Labour government had pursued a similar approach. For instance, when it opened labor markets to A8 nationals in 2004 it required new arrivals to spend 12 consecutive months in paid work and register on the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS), before they could claim social security. While European Court of Justice (ECJ) jurisprudence has subsequently allowed member states to make access to welfare increasingly conditional on time spent in work (Barbulescu & Favell, 2019; O’Brien, 2017), New Labour’s policies arguably exceeded the conditionality that was permissible in the late 2000s (O’Neill, 2011). Moreover, it is particularly notable that the aforementioned Home Office practice of seeking to deport homeless EU migrants was initiated not under the Conservative government, but towards the end of New Labour’s period in office (Ciupijus, 2011; Neilan, 2010).

These economic narratives on migration/migrants made something of a return following the 2016 referendum. Indeed, the same media that had deployed the various securitizing narratives described in the previous section began to shift (back) to a set of narratives focused on the economic costs of ending the FMoP regime. Morrison (2019) has highlighted the ways in which prominent economic stakeholders that had been largely sidelined by a broadly Eurosceptic press were, following the referendum, granted the space to express their concern with respect to the economic impact of the loss of flexible EU workers (Morrison, 2019, p. 605). EU workers who had been framed as threat to UK citizens’ ontological security were thus increasingly portrayed again as a *source* of economic security. Much of this shift in coverage focused initially on the potential loss of ‘high skilled’ migrants and in so doing drew a more circumscribed view of the ideal entrepreneurial EU citizen than that envisaged in the mid-2000s New Labour period. That narrative shift was, in part at least, reflected in a new migration policy that sought to offer a so-called ‘settled’ status to long term resident EU migrants, while introducing a ‘points based’ migration system focused on excluding the ‘low skilled’ (M. Morris, 2020). Post-2020, in a context of acute labor market shortages, the government notably opened avenues to work in the United Kingdom for certain ‘low-skilled’ workers, albeit both the government and Labour Party opposition were careful to emphasize that they remained opposed to the re-instatement of anything like FMoP. More generally, the Conservative government was pulled between a ‘global Britain’ agenda that involved the pursuit of trade deals that could require a loosening of migrant routes for certain nationalities beyond Europe, and the nationalist anti-migrant discourse that had prevailed in relation to FMoP (and Brexit more generally).

For current purposes the key point is that, whether narrowly or broadly drawn, conceptions of the ideal post-national EU citizen-qua-entrepreneur have always involved the ‘othering’ of certain subjectivities. In New Labour discourse, those ‘others’ were often welfare claimants or the homeless—including non-national EU citizens—that government policy had long sought to ‘activate’ economically through integration into flexible labor markets. Such narratives served to legitimize the welfare retrenchment of a ‘post-Fordist workfare state’—and an associated devaluation of informal reproductive and caring labor (Macleavy, 2007)—that long predated, and would endure beyond, the New Labour period in office (see Jessop, 1993). Such retrenchment was particularly acute for economically vulnerable migrants in the UK—including after 2007, EU migrants—who faced a double-‘Othering.’ Thus, notwithstanding their status as EU ‘citizens,’ the most vulnerable A8/A2 nationals in the UK—disproportionately minorities such as Roma and women with lone career responsibilities—faced exclusion

from the UK welfare state. And their precarious situation became ever more acute following the aforementioned 2014 Conservative government welfare reforms (O'Brien, 2017).

In short, moves to ostensibly *de*-securitize EU citizens as a migrant group by invoking their economic independence as mobile entrepreneurial workers is not without its own associated processes of exclusion. In relation to our broader conceptual argument, it is apparent that processes of securitization *and* de-securitization (Waeber, 1995)—and related moves to reconceive of 'home' in non-national(ist) terms (Mitzen, 2018)—can all potentially produce excluded 'Others.' As soon as the ontologically insecure or anxious subject is effectively (re)-secured through the crystallization of a coherent, ontologically secure, identity, 'Other' excluded identities are necessarily brought into existence. It is, from this perspective, not enough then to simply *de*-securitize migrants by reimagining an ontologically secure national citizen subject as, instead, an ontologically secure post-national entrepreneur. In that sense, the invocation of an 'entrepreneurial energy' (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020, p. 247) as a potentially more 'positive' response to the anxiety born out of ontological insecurity might be problematic, certainly if regarded as an ethical panacea. More generally, from a progressive political or normative perspective we ought to remain sensitive not only to the exclusionary impacts of a prevalent nationalism, but also to the exclusionary impacts of a 'market cosmopolitanism' (Parker, 2012b) that has long been championed by the EU and by many pro-European national governments.

### Post-Brexit spaces of esistance

We should be circumspect then about valorizing any *definitive* alternative ontologically secure identity. Given the aforementioned exclusions entailed in such a valorization we might do better to approach questions of identity with an 'ironic sensibility' (for instance Rorty, 2006, p. 57). Such a sensibility recognizes the inherently 'vicarious' nature of any subjectivity (Browning et al., 2021) and therefore, on the one hand, leaves open a space for resistance to forms of exclusion rooted in the promotion of a particular identity. On the other hand, it (ironically) accepts the need to sometimes invoke identity for the purpose of everyday ontological security *and* political resistance. What this means in practical terms can be fleshed out in relation to the post-referendum politics of the FMoP in the United Kingdom, where EU migrants and their advocates have strategically resisted practices of exclusion emerging from the discursive promotion of, variously, national citizen and post-national mobile entrepreneur.

On the one hand this resistance entailed attempts to *de*-securitize FMoP in accordance with the valorization of the post-national entrepreneur. For instance, following the 2016 referendum, many Polish EU citizens in the United Kingdom responded to the aforementioned exclusionary securitizing discourses by emphasizing their credentials as mobile-entrepreneurial economic subjects. As McGhee et al. (2019, p. 1106) have put it, they, "claim[ed] belonging in an ethical (but not political or national) community based on neoliberal principles of hard work and economic independence." Such claims understandably sought to delegitimize the prioritization of a national citizenship—apparent in the aforementioned narratives of resource competition and racialization—by emphasizing the economic discourses that had typically been invoked to defend FMoP in both the United Kingdom and across the broader EU. The championing of such a subjectivity has certainly been politically effective in promoting nondiscrimination on various non-economic grounds: in relation to, *inter alia*, nationality, gender, race, sexuality, and disability. However, as we have discussed, an embrace of the entrepreneurial mobile subject entails its

own exclusions; its own discriminatory possibility. In particular, those economically ‘inactive’ or ‘dependent’ EU migrants—or, in other words, poor and vulnerable EU migrants—are ‘Othered’ through such discourses.

On the other hand, then, vulnerable EU migrants resisted their own exclusions by championing a post-national (social) citizenship. In practice, they and their advocates drew on an enlarged conception of citizenship, rooted not in nationality or economic independence, but in a post-national European identity and an account of a *shared* experience, particularly in the face of a neoliberal capitalism. Such strategies of resistance pointed to the exploitative nature of highly flexible UK labor markets: *inter alia*, the proliferation of ‘zero hour’ contracts and unscrupulous employers; low levels of union protection; and frequently unenforced employment rights. These labor market conditions made it more difficult to meet the various welfare conditionalities that have toughened for everyone, but particularly for EU migrants (Dwyer et al., 2019). One small example of this kind of resistance is shown in Image 2, which depicts a defaced version of one of the aforementioned 2014 UKIP posters (as shown in Image 1). Pointing to the divide-and-rule tactics underpinning UKIP’s resource competition narrative, this version of the poster makes common cause between EU migrants and citizens in relation to their precarity as workers and at once invokes the need for solidarity with reference to the importance of trade union membership. It is on the basis of such common ground that claims to a post-national EU social citizenship can be effectively (re)made.

**Image 2. Resistance to a securitizing UKIP narrative (compare with Image 1).**



This latter form of resistance remained important even after the end of FMoP in Britain in 2020, in the context of the so-called ‘settlement scheme’ (Barnard & Menon, 2021) for EU citizens living in the UK. There were numerous issues with that scheme after 2020, particularly relating to issues of non-registration (the3million, 2021). Of particular relevance for current purposes, the British government decided to delimit the welfare rights of those EU nationals granted so-called ‘pre-settled’ status; a status that was given to the more than two million EU citizens who were unable to prove that they had resided in the United Kingdom more than five years. This situation caused high levels of deprivation for that group, including disproportionate levels of homelessness (Crisis UK, n.d.; Bramley et al., 2021) making them particularly susceptible to exploitation of various sorts. As the advocates of vulnerable EU citizens have long-noted, groups with patchier employment histories are most likely to find themselves in this

precarious position, including women with caring responsibilities (O'Brien, 2017) and Roma minorities (Dagilyte & Greenfields, 2015; Parker, 2012a; Parker & Catalán, 2014; Brown, 2021).

It is notable that the ECJ ruled in support of the UK government's welfare restrictions on those with pre-settled status, with implications also for those EU citizens resident in EU member states (O'Brien, 2021a, for a compelling critique of that ruling see 2021b). Such a judgement was consistent with the EU's post-economic crisis drift away from a nascent post-national social citizenship (see Caporaso & Tarrow, 2009) towards a post-national economic or market citizenship. In other words, a transition from a system that had significantly constrained member states from discriminating against the most vulnerable non-national EU citizens to one that explicitly allowed them to do so (Barbulescu & Favell, 2019), albeit in a variety of different ways (Kramer & Heindlmaier, 2021). Resistance to the British state's post-Brexit attempts to delimit the welfare rights of certain categories of EU citizen in the United Kingdom was thus compatible with resistance to the EU's own marketized conception of post-national citizenship.

The valorization of a social post-national EU citizenship is then contingently important in a Brexit Britain. But in relation to the broader theoretical contribution of this article, it is important to at least recognize that even this subjectivity produces an 'Other' given that any reconceived social contract or constitution must practically adjudicate on who is subject to that contract and, concomitantly, who is not: in Foucault's (Foucault, 2003) evocative words, 'society must be defended.' In this case, the 'Other' would primarily be non-EU migrants. Indeed, on the occasions that the EU has adopted a state-like or sovereign narrative of 'self,' it has constituted such exclusions, for instance, in the context of the 2015 so-called 'refugee crisis' (Ceccorulli, 2019; more generally, see Parker, 2012b). For those refugees, their subjectivity as post-national entrepreneurs, able to contribute to the EU economy, might be invoked as a useful pragmatic strategy of resistance *against* bordering practices aimed at securing a (social) *European* citizenship. A full consideration of the predicament of non-EU migrants in the UK/EU is well beyond the scope of this chapter, but it serves the current purpose of illustrating how the valorization of any identity—including that of an ostensibly inclusive and progressive *social* EU citizen—can entail important exclusions.

In accordance with the aforementioned 'ironic sensibility,' a progressive politics would do well then to reject the fantasy of an irrevocable, ontologically secure 'self' to which all should aspire, while at once strategically asserting and valuing certain identities in particular political contexts. This is politics as an ongoing and restless struggle against exclusion of the marginalized, rather than as the pursuit of permanent emancipation. In relation to our particular case, it is possible from this perspective to resist forms of exclusion rooted in *both* nationalist and economic rationalities, by variously problematizing and invoking liberal government's twin-invocation for us to be ontologically secure national (social) citizens and post-national entrepreneurs (Parker, 2012b).

## Conclusion

The foregoing argument pointed to the importance of securitizing narratives in triggering widespread psychological or ontological insecurity among UK citizens in relation to the FMoP and the presence of EU citizens living in the UK. It debunked the notion that material changes wrought by the arrival of larger-than-expected numbers of EU citizens *inexorably* or *automatically* led to the politicization of the issue. Rather, widespread securitizing narratives of scarcity and competition—reinforced at times with

transgressive racist discourses—were key factors in driving widespread anxiety with respect to the FMoP, particularly after the 2007 economic crisis, when very real material hardship was effectively (but erroneously) linked to the presence of growing numbers of EU citizens. FMoP was portrayed as a threat to key components of UK citizens' ontological security and, in a general sense, to the integrity of nation-as-home. However, this chapter also emphasized that ostensibly *de*-securitizing narratives celebrating a post-national conception of home and a concomitant mobile, economically independent or 'entrepreneurial' EU citizen are also potentially exclusionary. Such narratives were apparent in New Labour's post-2004 discourse, in some post-2016 and post-Brexit 'Remainer' argumentation, and in the post-2010 approach of the EU/ECJ to EU citizenship. Such narratives permitted the exclusion of the vulnerable and particularly migrants, who were rendered (implicitly or explicitly) as the 'Other' of the economically independent or entrepreneurial migrant.

The case study has pointed to the usefulness of securitization as conceived by a so-called Copenhagen school of security studies (Waever, 1995) and also of an international relations literature deploying the concept of ontological security (Mitzen, 2018a). The former is useful for conceptualizing the ways in which a particular issue or group—in our case the FMoP and EU citizens—can be cast as an existential, and therefore security, threat to a sovereign nation-state. And the latter can help us to understand the psychological dynamics via which individuals and broader collectivities experience a sense of ontological security and insecurity in response to securitizing dynamics. Perhaps unsurprisingly for literatures emerging from the discipline of *Inter-national* Relations, both literatures have usually focused on the ways in which a sense of security is closely connected to a sense of home, which in turn is often linked to conceptions of nation. Processes of securitization often point to threats to home-as-nation in a manner that can lead to anxiety, which, in turn, serves to legitimize the 'othering' of those regarded as non-national or non-citizen.

However, and more important for current purposes, the case also points to the potential ethical and political limits of the two aforementioned literatures. It suggests that any *de*-securitizing move—conceived by the Copenhagen school as a shift to portray a securitized issue within the realm of an ostensibly 'normal' or liberal politics—ought not be conceived as an ethical or political panacea (Parker, 2012a; Munster, 2009; Bigo, 2000; Aradau, 2004). Relatedly, the case points to the limits of a mainstream ontological security literature in international relations scholarship. Responses to ontological insecurity or anxiety which do not invoke the nation in looking to restore a subjective sense of security may also be exclusionary; for instance, if they are rooted in a celebration of an alternative identity, including an "entrepreneurial energy" (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020b). Otherwise put, a conception of home (Mitzen, 2018a) as a post-national or 'post-Westphalian market,' might also create important exclusions (see also Parker & Rosamond, 2013). In the case explored, New Labour discourses as well recent ECJ narratives on FMoP/EU citizenship contain just such exclusions. In policy terms this means the marginalization of the economically 'inactive' or 'dependent'—or, in less pejorative terms, the *most vulnerable*—EU non-national citizen.

EU citizens in the United Kingdom might, in response to their exclusions as delinquent citizens or delinquent entrepreneurs, contingently make common cause with UK citizens as, respectively, fellow entrepreneurs or fellow (social) citizens. At the same time, UK citizens might contingently stand in solidarity both with those entrepreneurial EU citizens who are 'successfully' navigating the vagaries of a neoliberal Britain/EU *and particularly* those vulnerable EU citizens who have become victims of those very

same vagaries. Concretely, this would mean rejecting the nationalist-populist securitization of EU citizens in the post-Brexit United Kingdom and championing a return of FMoP. It would also mean though supporting a version of that regime that is far more inclusive than that promoted by its (neo)liberal advocates in both the United Kingdom and the EU, as part of a broader championing of a more social Europe.

In accord with the conception of politics advocated herein (see also Parker 2012a), even that social Europe is no ethical endpoint or panacea. In narrating an ontologically secure European citizen-subject, it potentially solidifies the predicament of a range of ‘others,’ including non-European migrants in UK/EU space. However, the nurturing of an ‘ironic sensibility’ will make it difficult for such ‘othering’ to remain unchallenged. To paraphrase Rorty (2006, p. 57), while “today’s chains are often forged from hammers which struck off yesterday’s. . . [these] chains might, with luck, get a little lighter and more breakable each time.”

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## Chapter 9

### **Urban resilience and ontological security: analyzing de-bordering processes in Barcelona**

*Ricard Zapata-Barrero*

#### **Framing the discussion on resilient ontological security at the city level**

In this chapter I ask critical questions about what happens to the so-called borderlands when ‘borderings’ are displaced to other scales such as the cities that are not usually categorized as “border cities.” Staying within the debate, which links border studies and migration studies, my purpose is to conceptualize a focus that connects two heuristic approaches: ontological security and urban resilience. The initial conceptual affinity is as follows: ontological security plays the role of normative foundation of urban resilience when applied at urban governance. The initial thesis is that resilience can be considered as a regulatory and constitutive principle in the governance of urban migration. I take this thesis from a recent study that applies it in general, without dealing with migration governance (Svitková, 2021, p. 9). In this context, resilience-building is a policy strategy for empowering cities and developing urban capacities and learning to govern with the spectrum of uncertainties, hazards, and risks related to migration-related stresses. Resilient cities look for ways to face pressure in their legal, institutional, and policy infrastructures, with interconnected cultural, economic, territorial/demographic, political, and social dimensions (IOM, 2017, p. 5).

As an initial definition, a resilient city applied at migration governance is that it is an urban system that has developed a set of capacities that help it absorb migration governance-related stressors that directly affect its social, economic, cultural, and political systems and infrastructure in order to maintain its vital regulatory functions. For us, the development of resilience begins when cities incorporate stressors into their own agendas and then begin to think strategically about how to react proactively to these pressures. We can also begin with UN Habitat’s core definition, which highlights the transformative dimension:

Urban Resilience is the measurable ability of any urban system, with its inhabitants, to maintain continuity through all shocks and stresses, while positively adapting and transforming toward sustainability. A Resilient City assesses, plans, and acts to prepare and respond to hazards—natural and human-made, sudden and slow-onset, expected and unexpected—in order to protect and enhance people’s live, secure development gains, foster an environment for investment, and drive positive change (UN-Habitat, 2018).

The driven force of resilience action for many cities is that if they do nothing, the current circumstances may lead to increased spatial slums, precariousness, territorial segregation, discrimination, and racism, and increased social conflict, instability, coexistence uncertainty, and disturbances in the society. There are also some byproducts such as xenophobia, continuous infringement on human rights, and the politics of urban hostility against migrants (Da Silva & Morera, 2014; MacKinnon, 2015; Yamagata & Maruyama, 2016). One of the increasing resilient strategies showing cities’ agency capacity and autonomy building is when we focus on their policy practices towards refugees, undocumented adults, unaccompanied



children, and vulnerable women (Mallet-Garcia & Delvino, 2020, pp. 1-27). Extreme human situations generated by multiple social stress processes often generated by external factors, such as the state and/or EU bordering processes.

A normative foundation of urban resilience, the notion of “ontological security” expresses at the city level a concern on the “security of the self,” which operates, as we will see for the case of Barcelona, at two levels: at the social level, the city council’s resilience strategy seeks to maintain cohesion-making; at the individual level, the city council seeks to provide migrants with the minimum inclusive threshold of “the right to have rights.”<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is the outcome of an exploratory theoretical-empirical research. First, I introduce the theoretical background linking ontological security and de-bordering processes at the city scale. Then, the conceptual lens linking ontological security and resilience strategies will be justified. Thirdly, the Barcelona de-bordering processes’ case study will be examined with a methodological section leading the presentation of findings. Finally, some concluding remarks evaluating this first theoretical-empirical exploration will close this chapter, drawing some paths for further comparative research.

### **1. The theoretical background: a multi-scalar understanding of ontological security and the de-bordering processes at the city level**

A consolidated literature on bordering and re-bordering already exists (Brunet-Jailly, 2011, pp. 1-6; Paasi, 2012, pp. 2303-2309; Wastl-Walter, 2016), but, in comparison, there is a still under-researched area on de-bordering. These three research tracks are different heuristic angles of analysis in border studies (Newman & Paasi, 1998; Paasi, 2011; Cooper & Tinning, 2019). Taken literally, “de-bordering” means processes of opening borders by removing existing restrictions. Symbolically it can also refer to tearing up legal, political, and social barriers that have been enacted by higher authorities. Some scholars even add normative dimensions that go beyond this descriptive root, including bridging processes when two spaces where initially separated (for instance, Chen, 2013, p. 1)

Border studies generally uses “border” in two main senses. As a borderland separating two sovereign states, which may coincide with the geographical territory or not, as it happens in the debate of externalization of borders in migration studies, where borders of one state may be in the borderline of the other state separated by continents and sea (Munster & Sterkx, 2006, pp. 229-250; Zaiotti, 2018; Lemberg-Pedersen, 2019, pp. 247-271). But the debate today is on identifying the multiple border spaces within and beyond the states’ territory (Kolossoff & Scott, 2013; Laine, 2016, pp. 465-482; Andersen, et al., 2016). Today there is a major shift in border studies towards a much more symbolic and vernacular meaning (Cooper, *et al.*, 2016, pp. 15-32). This involves that borders may be scattered through society, in every-day life (Jones & Johnson, 2016; Cassidy, et al., 2018). Inequality, legal status, discrimination, racism, exclusion, power relations, education, and social class can be concepts analyzed through the

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt summarized magisterially the precondition of human rights, those rights that belong to every person by virtue of existence, as the “right to have rights,” interpreted by Benhabib (2011, chap. 2) as a direct challenge to nation-states monopoly of distribution of citizenship rights: “This new situation, in which “humanity” has in effect assumed the role formerly ascribed to nature or history, would mean in this context that the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself” (Arendt, 1976; 298).

border lens. In fact, it is these “spheres of meanings” (Zapata-Barrero, 2013, p. 5) that make border studies so multi-diffuse.

Alongside this fuzzy meaning, border-presence can be multi-scalar, from states to regions and cities. This may allow us to connect the geographical/territorial meaning with the symbolic/vernacular meaning. The fact is that states are the main actors of the bordering process, but other level of governments such as cities are often forced to manage the effects in their societal systems. This entails that we may consider bordering processes in legal, social, and political aspects, which are vital both for migrants and cities. Moreover, these local bordering processes frame the relations between migrants and cities. This is the specific focus of this chapter and from where we will formulate the key-questions: how do states’ bordering processes affect migrant/city relations, and how cities draw and practice de-bordering strategies? As a premise, these de-bordering strategies will be interpreted as resilient strategies, and the foundation legitimating these strategies as a certain understanding of “ontological security” applied at the city level.

The local authorities may follow state border dictates in a rigid form, and then accept the limits of migrant rights’ inclusion/exclusion established by the state, or not. In this case city officers can follow their assistance and humanitarian views, and even their claim-making against state’s border criteria. For instance, this is currently happening in several cities receiving refugees and rescue boats in the Mediterranean, or cities creating welcoming networks with other cities or supporting NGOs’ initiatives, as it is the case of the Charter of Lampedusa (2014) and the Charter of Palermo (2015). This militant face of cities (Lacroix *et al.*, 2020) has increased since 2015 in the Mediterranean within the so called “Migration and Refugee crisis.” It can be framed within the current “local turn” (Zapata-Barrero *et al.*, 2017, pp. 241–246) debate in migration studies, where cities become actors and then begin to be analyzed by their own distinctive initiatives within a multi-level framework of vertical relations with other level of governments and even build alliances horizontally with other social actors and cities. It is this autonomy-building and empowering phase that I am interested in exploring under the focus of resilient cities.

## **2. The conceptual lens: linking ontological security and the processes of building resilience at the local level**

My starting premise comes from the debate that assumes that bordering policies are driven by ontological security (Mitzen, 2006a; Mitzen, 2006b; Mitzen, 2018; Johansson-Nogués, 2018). This creates a logic of inclusion and exclusion, when some migrants manage to enter the territory but are immediately expelled at different degrees from the societal system. This often provokes stress on local authorities who must deal with micro-politics, short-term and proximity issues, despite migrants being out of the system—sometimes for humanitarian reasons or simply pragmatic ones since “migrants are here and now.” But the legitimacy can also come from the same society, which claims more cohesion and stability. Local authorities must reach a policy/social equilibrium between migrants’ exclusion environment and some part of their population that may interpret these policies towards “Others” as contravening their everyday routines as a society. These “hard cases” can be viewed as stressors for local authorities, since institutionally they cannot ignore their situation despite knowing they are outcomes of upper-level bordering processes. For most cities this breaks their policy routines towards migrants, and most cities in such situations are

forced to enter into resilience strategies, looking at narratives and practices that most of the time go beyond their own routinized policies' scope.

The effort to reestablish policy routines or reboot new ones is what is at the core of the resilience concept. From a conceptual point of view, this is very close to the semantics of “ontological security.” Inspired by the core debates around the concept (Da Silva & Morera, 2014; MacKinnon, 2015; Biggs, *et al.*, 2016), ‘resilience’ is understood as a policy strategy followed by public authorities to deal with the tense relation between exogeneous/endogenous stressors and policy routines. These stressors can have many sources: institutional pressures or juridical and political limits, often coming from upper level of governments and the same multi-level structure of the state; social stresses, such as discrimination and racism, precariousness (unemployment, lack of income, poverty), legal status (refugees, undocumented, etc.), age (unaccompanied children), gender (vulnerable women). The current pandemic COVID-19 even acts as an accelerator of these current stressors (Bandarin *et al.*, 2020; European Commission, 2015; GRITIM-UPF, 2020; Mallet-Garcia & Delvino, 2020; İçduygu, 2020; OECD, 2020; Verhaeghe & Ghekiere, 2021) and in most cases it worsens the current vulnerable situations of most migrants. What interests me to focus on are those factors that are directly/indirectly byproducts of state's bordering process. In this case, I look at specific situations where cities must deal with human and social situations generated by external factors originated by the state and/or EU legislation and competence systems, and now aggravated by the pandemic shock. The premise is then that building resilience governance is not an isolated practice, since it necessarily involves breaking current administrative and legal boundaries, and allow for a holistic and integrated urban approach, involving multi-level governance and multi-scalar relations with a multiplicity of public and private actors.

The main argument is that city resilience is pushing cities towards new narratives and practices on de-bordering practices motivated by their understanding of their “self,” and hence, by ontological security. In political theoretical terms, ontological security acts a normative foundation of city's resilience. The full argument can be formulated as follows: today there are some structural stressors and acute shocks that most cities must face, which are provoked by states and EU (re)bordering processes, and that force most cities to follow de-bordering resilient strategies with the purpose to ensure the ontological security of their own system and of the migrants that are placed outside the social and political system. Before properly developing all the theoretical dimensions of this argument, my first priority is to concentrate delineating the heuristic opportunities in bonding resilience strategy analysis with an ontological security normativity.

## 2.1 Ontological security applied at the local level

The suggestive notion of ontological security, initially thought of as an approach in international relations, is beginning to have a certain popularity in border studies and migration studies. The seminal idea is that the ‘self’ constructs its own identity through routines. There is then a clear link between identity and agency since it is not only through narratives but through practices that identity can be deployed. The basic function of routines is to keep a sense of continuity of the self. There is always then a certain relation of identity with temporality and space. The main stressors of routines, and hence on ontological security, are uncertainties surrounding a particular social environment.

Even if the conceptual system of ontological security remains the same at whatever scale of application, the conceptual horizon behind may change. At the individual level, the security of the self may be the system of routines that a person may follow their everyday life in their neighborhood, but also in whatever place the person may have the opportunity to develop their agency (this is in fact the original view set up by Giddens, 1991; and Mitzen, 2006a). At the state level, this ontological security may take the dimension of legal and policy routines but also the national flag and the religious traditions that legitimate them (Mitzen, 2006a). Hence the normativity founding the same content of national security is key to understand how it may be used in combining critical diagnosis with ideal expectations (Sorensen, 2008, pp. 5-32).

To my knowledge, this multi-scalar application of the notion has not yet reached the local level. My initial claim is that cities are also subject to ontological security since they also seek to ensure the routinization of their policies. This application can remain at the structural level, as the policy and legal routinizations of their governance, but also, we can give centrality to the main horizon that may picture these social routines. In this view, the main drivers of local ontological security are both cohesion-making at societal level, but empowering migrants with the “right to have rights.” This means that stressors breaking routines at the local social system and then configuring a scenario of uncertainty, are directly related to these two principles. Cohesion may have many different meanings (Zapata-Barrero, 2022), and it can even be a *passee-partout* concept, but the core concept means togetherness, a “structure whose parts stick together” (Burns *et al.*, 2018, p. 9). In our reading, to share routines among the inhabitants, even if each one may have different ones shaping their identities. This cohesion-based view of ontological security allows us to go beyond the state-dependence view of ontological security, as one related to the national flag. Here the idea of cohesion, of place-making of everyday life routines play a prominent role. If we take the meaning of ontological security as a way of identity-making and identity-keeping, then place-making may replace the national flag for the sense of belonging, as a necessary ingredient (not sufficient of course) for cohesion-making (Kearns & Forrest, 2000; Mehta, 2019).

## 2.2 Resilient policy strategies at the local level

There is already a long-standing debate on urban resilience (M. Hamstead *et al.*, 2016; Wilkinson & Remøy, 2018; Burayidi *et al.*, 2020). The numerous reviews of the literature on urban resilience (Galderisi, 2014) deal with topics such as climate change, natural disasters, including terrorism, poverty, and revolutionary movements. But immigration, as a social stress factor for cities, has not been investigated in depth, despite being a determining global phenomenon for the future of cities. In addition, the main focus of much of the literature is on resilience building processes (how to build resilient policies) and drivers (what factors trigger resilience), but here too there is no discussion of the normative foundations of urban resilience in relation to migration governance. The resilience focus helps us channel and interconnect most of the cities’ policy behavior originated by pressure related to migration that would otherwise be scattered. This focus is then a powerful focus that helps us to articulate different pressures related to state bordering processes.

The rough concept of resilience is often used as a synonym for adaptation to an adverse environment, but also the capacity to transform this environment to reach a new structural scenario that may include this external factor into the societal system. These two dimensions give rise to two major

meanings: a reactive and proactive meaning. The reactive meaning is ideologically conservative. It designates the fact that the functioning of a system is altered by an external factor and we need to build a strategy to restore the preexisting routine. The proactive meaning is much more creative and progressive since it involves looking at transforming the preexisting environment with renovated routines and/or even new ones. Here, its link with the analytical distinction made by Mitzen (2006a, pp. 341–370) between flexible or rigid routines play a prominent role. The rigidity of routines is much more related to the reactive meaning of resilience, and the proactive to the reflexivity of routines, and the potential to transform routines.

There is no closed definition of urban resilience, but almost all first reports share the idea that what matters are the innovative and creative aspects of narratives and practice. Some even speak about the transformative aspect of urban resilience (Yamagata & Maruyama, 2016), breaking down usual boundaries and traditions, as well as legally established frameworks (UN Habitat, 2015; OECD, 2014). One influential report pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation (100 Resilient Cities, 2017) illustrates the importance of re-conceptualizing the urban landscape to include the shocks and stresses of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as the need to build overall resilience that can ensure cities thrive amid the uncertainties of the years ahead. In general, the literature identifies three distinctive dimensions of resilience: buffering capacity, self-organization (and self-regulation for ecosystems), and learning (Walker & Salt, 2012).

### **3. Case study: Barcelona’s de-bordering processes. Theorizing resilient ontology security at the local level**

Barcelona city is a good example of the de-bordering processes that can be analyzed linking ontological security and resilience strategy building. Barcelona is the capital of Catalonia and recognized as being innovative in most of its migration/diversity policies by many international reports (for instance, OECD, 2018). Cohesion-making and empowering migrants with minimum “right to have rights” are the two the main principles shaping its policy routes in its resilience strategies. After a first sources and methods section, we structure our findings in three main sections. We first frame the main findings within the theoretical-empirical framework of resilient ontological-security (3.2.). Then, we identify the main resilient areas that call for de-bordering processes and are grounded on ontological security (3.3.). Finally, and not least important, we conceptualize the alliances and institutions buildings as byproduct of Barcelona’s resilient ontological security (3.4.).

#### **3.1 Sources and Methods**

Documentary analysis and seven key interviews with head politicians, leading policy officers, and advisory experts covering the spectrum of migration policies (from welcoming policies, diversity and sectoral policies) were approached<sup>2</sup> in a semi-structured interview design requesting them to identify the main

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<sup>2</sup> The interviews were held between January to April 2021, and with an average of one hour per interview. The interviews and interviewees are as follows:

KG: Khalid Ghali Bada, Commissioner for Intercultural Dialogue and Religious Pluralism at Barcelona City Council (28/01/2021).

challenges generated by external factors that force the city to look at innovative and strategic policies. This fieldwork reached saturation of information in this first exploratory stage. More details on given resilient strategies could be covered through other interviews at lower levels of policymaking and other social sectors identified. Yet, this would not substantially modify the rough core theoretical design and the main framework structure of resilient strategies we have carved. Nor would it affect the system of normative justifications and claim-making that will give content to the ontological security notion applied at the local levels.

In concrete terms, I first requested an overview of the main pressures that Barcelona city council encounters, but that they feel are byproducts of external forces, basically the state's bordering policies. Then, we navigated issue by issue, and I inquired on which were their main de-pressure strategies. We had already framed the first contact, informing the interviewees that we were interested in discussing creative and innovative strategies to maintain or create new policy routines despite limited resources. I even used the catchword used by my first interview, "We need a lot of imagination to face situations created by other levels of government." This interview's strategy worked well in provoking engaged information, mixing diagnosis with claim-making, and even justifying "city activism."

Following a participatory strategy and the ethical guidelines of a signed consent form, transcriptions were made and shared with participants to validate (add/delete) information, before properly analyzing them. The documentary analysis comprised the main official writings produced by the city council, once I identified the main stresses calling for resilient strategies, most of them mentioned by participants. It also comprised the main issue-related scholarly production on Barcelona migration policies and newspapers commenting on issues and strategies.

In the content analysis of the interviews, apart from identifying pressures calling for resilient de-bordering strategies, I used three meaningful analytical distinctions to articulate the analysis of interviews. The premised pattern is that most of the resilient strategies for building ontological security are the outcome of multilevel tensions between state bordering processes and the city de-bordering processes. I focused the content analysis in identifying these tensions and seeing how cities find ways to deal with them following the focus of resilient ontological security.

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AG: Aida Guillén, Director of the Citizenship, Rights and Diversity Services Department at Ajuntament de Barcelona (Barcelona City Council) (10/03/2021).

MS: Marc Serra, Councilor for Citizenship Rights, Participation and Global Justice at Barcelona City Council (19/04/2021).

XC: Xavier Cubells, Immigration and Refugee Services Director at Barcelona City Council (10/03/2021).

RS: Ramon Sanahuja, Expert. Former responsible of Welcome policy at Barcelona City Council (2006-2020) (24/03/2021).

DT: Dani de Torres, Expert and Former Commissioner at the European Council for the Intercultural Cities Program (2007-2011) and Current Director of Intercultural Cities (15/03/2021).

SF: Sonia Fuertes, Commissioner for Social Action at Barcelona City Council (18/03/2021).

### 3.2 Framing the first findings within the theoretical-empirical framework

Barcelona is a clear example of how policy innovation is related to resilience and the de-bordering process, and how ontological security works as a normative principle to justify these practices. AG makes this clearly from the very beginning of the interview: “I believe that the whole story revolves around Immigration Law and its impact on citizenship law. At the local level, we cannot afford to distinguish between the national and immigrant population because many services and the infrastructures of the city rely upon the taxes that all of them contribute with. For us, the main criterion is *who* lives in the city, *who* is a resident.” This awareness of state pressure clusters almost all the participants.<sup>3</sup> Moved by the ontological security premises, they also recognize they must develop policy engineering and “imagination” to circumvent bordering restrictions.<sup>4</sup>

In general, the main resilient psychology of policy officers generates because they do not only identify problems but are aware they need to provide a quick and effective answer to prevent the escalation of ontology security problems both at the level of social system (cohesion-making) and at the level of the same resilience of migrants (vulnerability and exclusion). There is also an initial shared awareness of the link between knowledge needs as a tool for resilience prevention. For instance, DT signals “we need segregation prevention policies to guarantee the city’s cohesion.” Therefore, he includes information-making as a key a strategy: “in front of these topics, the most problematic issue is a lack of knowledge” (this statement is reinforced in Ara, 2019).

There is also a shared concern about how to deal with the dichotomy between mainstreaming and specific policies’ strategies. For instance, RS insists that all these municipal policies are always devised trying to avoid excessive specificity and to work with what already exist and towards all people. Most often, innovation comes from the specificity policy corner. One example of how the internal resilience logic works in building a policy strategy is provided by MS when he asserts: “We have many neighbors who are very integrated and who are actually part of the city’s register (‘padró’), access regularly access the city’s services and hold a health card, who enjoy a developed associative life and whose children attend school, but they cannot opt for job offers because they have not been properly legalized by the state administration.” It is here that from the city council, apart from the legal counselling services, have made public employment offers. It has been offered by *Barcelona Activa* through an adaptation of the employment conditions, which until recently were only six months long, adequate for the local population, but not for immigrants. Two years ago, Barcelona city council extended it to a length of one year with the purpose to “legalize these people.” Last year, 150 immigrants benefited from it and they were immediately granted work. The development of innovative strategies is then motivated by this resilience and often pushes policy makers towards specific treatment.

Time pressure is also often referenced, which means governing by urgency, since some situations cannot simply be on standby for weeks. This time pressure is complemented by scarce economic, legal, political, and human resources. The most important barrier often referred to are legal frameworks, because legality is the main state resource framing bordering policies. RS shows us how bordering processes make cities resilient, and this time with clear spatial dimensions: “I would also add something that you have not mentioned, which is the arrival of immigrants through the coasts like the Canary Islands

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<sup>3</sup> AG: we cannot avoid the Immigration Laws and their impact on immigrant people and their rights.

<sup>4</sup> KG: I am afraid that it depends a lot on state law. But this does not mean that meanwhile, we cannot be creative and find ways to circumvent it.

(island to the coast of Africa) and their later transfer to Barcelona and other cities where they find themselves abandoned and in irregular administrative status.” This same case is referred by MS, who incorporates additional information confirming resilience psychology as a background of their decisions: “if we know that currently there is an immigration inflow in the Canary Islands or Andalucía (South of Spain), we can already expect it to reach Barcelona in three months. It is not simple at all for a system that has been designed to supply services in circumstances of stability, not of crisis.”

This resilient psychology of officers appears several times in the interviews. As an illustration, MS clarifies:

...the situation of uncertainty caused by immigration flows has a strong impact on our system and we often have to make a big effort to find resources. We are also limited by contractual frameworks: bureaucracy is increasingly tedious and to make the modification you are often constrained by an end. We have several times overpassed these limits and we have been forced to make a new contract even if the former had not expired, because of a sudden immigration jump.

Together, the awareness of doing lobbying is always in the mind of policy makers and one widespread resilient strategy of Barcelona. This is also part of the resilient psychology that policy officers must manage. RS expresses it very clearly: “We do what we can... because there are issues that are determined by regulations. [...] But in the end, the tools that are available to you depend on the legislative framework and here, there is no other choice but political work: reminders, awareness-raising, claim-making.” This resilient strategy is a way to incorporate, into the public agenda, challenges that they must face “without being the city council’s fault,” as XC argues. But activism is also a strategy when the city defends “the right to have rights” of migrants, when they fight to provide migrants with the necessary documents to restore their “legality” and to simply become “legal” in the eyes of the state. With many examples, we can pursue with how this resilient psychology is installed in policymakers’ minds by the two-plugged understanding of the ontological security: cohesion-making and empowering migrants with the right to have rights.

The interviews also show us that there are at least four main topics at the top of their resilience agenda, and how policy officers face them with ontological security principles: inclusion of immigrants into the public administration or the “diversity gap,” unaccompanied underage immigrants, irregular migrants, and refugees. Most of these pressures are channeled under citizenship policy programs (Gebhardt, 2016). But before going through them, let us quickly analyze the Barcelona Immigration Plan 2018–2021. All the four stressors are incorporated, and the plan combines actions and claim-making, especially on these bordering issues. Overlooking the former plans, the new 2018–2021 plan reminds us that in the 2002 plan, the objectives were to guarantee the people’s access to universal resources and services through the mechanism of ‘empadronament’ (registration in the city’s census); spreading the values of diversity, and making policies oriented to scaffolding coexistence and preventing conflict (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2018a, p. 5).

Here we have all the dimensions of ontological security together with one of the key core strategies of resilient policies (proactive city registration, as I will analyze later): cohesion-building, providing security to vulnerable people, and social conflict prevention. The recognition that the objective is not only empowering vulnerable migrants, but at the same time to avoid that these situations increase conflict, is always present. This risk-management prevention is explicitly included in the section of administrative irregularity: “It is in this way that their situation of administrative exclusion creates real



situations of social exclusion and segregation that may jeopardize the citizen coexistence. Therefore, Barcelona city council has had to give answers to it, although with little or no collaboration from the side of the state administration” (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2018a, p. 29).

The ontological-security-grounding resilience strategies operates at two levels. Most participants assume that if nothing is done, this can create subjective/objective insecurity in the society. So, the stressful situations are originated not only by the political will to stabilize migrants’ lack of basic rights, situations that are the result of the state’s bordering processes, but the conviction that if nothing is done, social conflict and a general insecurity atmosphere may spread. The example given by MS of the rise of the far right in Andalucía is illustrative. MS says that inclusive policies that secure rights for all are also an antidote against the entry of the far right in the administration. So, in the same resilience strategies these two levels are present: assistance, empowering policies, but also avoidance that these same situations create security issues that may affect cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

In general, we see two main arguments, and both are related to the principles regulating their ontological security approach: on the one hand, to ensure peaceful coexistence and cohesion, and on the other hand, to provide migrants with resources, power and autonomy, since there is a general awareness that their situation of exclusion and vulnerability could increase by bordering decisions of the state.

#### *Ontological security at the local social system level*

Interviews show us that the main purpose of innovation is to maintain social cohesion in society (conviviality and peaceful coexistence). RS highlights that “coexistence challenges” are often less voiced because they do not have as much visual impact on the streets as other “burning issues.” They mix with the rise of the far right and a radical change in the political and media specter in Spain, which is out of Barcelona’s reach. Consequently, there has been a surge of racist messages everywhere, even within the city of Barcelona, that we did not observe ten years ago. Instead, now they enjoy a central position in the media and political spaces like the Catalan Parliament.

Some interviewees say that “not doing anything is not only a breach of human rights and vulnerability, but also a matter of survival as social fabric” (SF). DT also confirms all these aspects and even includes equality as an ontological security resource. XC makes it clear:

...our main aim at immigration services is that people are always included in the city’s system at least for a period of two years. This means that their children attend school, that they develop certain neighborhood ties so that they have access to the social services network like any other person. And we give this initial support to ensure their inclusion in the city’s reality.

#### *Ontological security at the individual level*

Empowerment and the autonomy-building of migrants are key principles for most of the interviewees. They often refer to them as policies against legal exclusion and vulnerability. XC insists that “we want these people to be autonomous, that they get over their migration grieves. And especially, the inclusion aspect: we do not want to support them in a paternalistic way, but for them to develop their own abilities and to contribute in a way or another socially to a city that has limbo historically been at the crossroads of

cultures.” Speaking about undocumented children RS says, “they need the institutional backup because otherwise, they would end up on the streets too.” This is a clear ontological security argument. This means that without city intervention, the security of the child worsens. Other examples appear in newspapers (Roig, 2016), when explaining how most irregular immigrants addressed to CITE are women, because many work in domestic services or care for older people (or even prostitution). Here we understand situations of vulnerability that arise from bordering processes, and most often related to limited rights of the people that make them more vulnerable in the market and other situations and make it difficult for them to plan a life project. Most of these situations require policy interventions, as part of resilient actions seeking to ensure ontological security. Along these lines, SF highlights, for example, that “people must understand that any of us would do the same to save our own lives when there is nothing to lose. Therefore, anything that we can do will be welcome. [...]. When we speak about the coverage of basic rights, we have already overlooked a whole array of issues.” This means that local policies must deal with the survival and resilient strategies of the same migrants. SF insists that “it is more difficult to put across the experiences of people who try to survive on informal economic activities and that every night dream of being deported by the police to their countries.”

This resilient mindset provides us with very important localizations of where the stressor operates. For instance, SF and others often speak about the situation of some people as being in a “limbo.” This is not new for migration studies, and it often affects irregulars and refugees, who are “lost in a limbo” (Nimführ & Sesay, 2019; Ukrayinchuk & Havrylchuk, 2020). This “limbo situation” displays the dysfunction between policy structure and legality. It is always an unexpected, unforeseen, and an unanticipated situation. A clear byproduct of state bordering processes, grounded by other understandings of ontological security, based on national control and state security. This shows how strong the effects of the state’s bordering process operate for people who manage to enter and become irregulars, or are waiting on an administrative resolution of their refugee request, or even become irregular while being regulars, as an induced situation (there is a special section on this, p. 29–30, in the current Plan 2018-2021). Becoming an irregular immigrant overnight and entering a limbo situation directly nurtures the resilience of local authorities moved by ontological security principles of cohesion-making and empowering minimal rights to migrants. Following this same rationale, XC insists: “think that if you are left outside the asylum procedure and fall into a situation of administrative irregularity, you end up on the streets and the state does not help you in any way. It only sends you back to your country. These people will not vanish from our city.”

Local de-bordering processes may also suppose what SF labels as “deinstitutionalization processes,” since entering in a limbo as it has been described may also imply being stigmatized: migrants are criminalized by bordering processes. The link between vulnerability and criminalization even reaches the unaccompanied minors (acronym MENA—*Menors d’edat no acompanyats*).

But the main resilient strategy is definitively proactive administrative registration or “empadronament.” This ensures “the right to have rights.” This is a very distinctive tool of the decentralized Spanish administration: the possibility to register administrative migrants independently of their legal status. The city council simply ranks administrative recognition before legal recognition.<sup>5</sup> This is used as a powerful resource for the de-bordering process, and to implement what in some urban studies literature is called “right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1967; Marcuse, 2014) the right to live in the city, and

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<sup>5</sup> XC insists: “registration into the city’s records should be done regardless of the legal status.”

enjoy all its basic services and place environments despite legal bordering restrictions. Granting registration allows the city council to legitimize further resilient strategies. In theoretical terms we can say it is a primary resilience tool, as it operates as a condition for other resilient sectoral policies (housing, education, and work, for instance)—as XC informs us, for example, the public health system. The CAPs (Centers for Primary Attention and Health) are allocated as regards the address.

This does not mean that if you are not registered you will not be received, because in Catalonia there is a commitment to take care of everybody and this works to our advantage. But if you want to enjoy a proximity service you need the registration [...] And as for schooling registrations, geographical proximity becomes more fundamental to design the city's schooling map. You need to know the city's reality to defend their rights.

In fact, many resources that are granted by the EU are allocated based on demographic records. Along these lines, XC even insists that for him, the city registration is also a housing policy, since the city council registers people who do not hold permanent housing. This city registration has then multifaceted de-bordering effects. It provides undocumented migrants of opportunities to enjoy a minimum “right of the city.”

### 3.3 Main resilient areas directly related to the de-bordering processes

The empirical analysis allows us to identify four main resilient areas that call for de-bordering processes and that are grounded on ontological security.

#### a) *Inclusion of immigrants into the public administration or the “diversity gap”*

The legal system in Spain is strict. It does not let public administration incorporate migrants. According to the Basic Statute of the Public Servant [Estatuto Básico del Empleado Público, Art. 57, Law 7/2007] the access to public function (*función pública*) is exclusive to national citizens.<sup>6</sup> This creates a real barrier to manage the “diversity gap” (Zapata-Barrero *et al.*, 2017) between the society and public institutions. Barcelona is fully aware of this bordering restriction. The data from the Council of Europe showed in 2017 (Council of Europe, 2017; Zapata-Barrero, 2019) this was one of the governance deficits. All the interviews place this issue within their resilient agenda. The motto is “Public institutions must reflect Barcelona's society.” SF convincingly states “I always insist on material conditions but also symbolic ones because no matter how many messages you send to society about diversity, if the institutions are essentially ‘white’ or if there is a lot of male power...!” We are thinking about the same public administration, services, or local police (*Guàrdia Urbana*), for instance. Here positive action towards migrants can be interpreted as de-bordering policies looking at alternative ways to reduce the diversity gap.

It is when speaking about this particular issue that KG stated, “yes, as long as we do not change state laws, we must look for imaginative and proactive alternatives. Sometimes there are things we think that would not work and, in the end, they bear fruit.” Or even AG says: “you just need to be imaginative and innovative. And if you are discriminated against for your origins, then we can require your language abilities, or we can look for a way to certify your intercultural mediation skills.” This involves that most

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<sup>6</sup> In principle, EU citizens can only access it and non-EU citizens can only access the positions of the administration of labor personnel (not civil servants).

of the strategies go through some light modifications of existing norms. In this case, one of the core strategies is to modify internal norms and include language and intercultural skill abilities as a condition for access, for instance. A legislative change is not strictly needed to give access. But stability and permanence cannot be ensured except only for national citizens.

Of course, this resilient strategy reduces the stress for the governance of diversity, but it is not an emergency in the sense that it can threaten the cohesion of the social system and hence have a direct ontological security impact. But it can influence racism and prejudices in society and illustrate democratic deficits. RS expresses this argument showing how most of the resilient innovative strategies have an international background: “It is said by the EU and Eurocities’ charter: ‘cities have to mirror the population that they serve.’ In Barcelona, less than one percent of civil servants come from a ‘diverse’ background. This is unacceptable!”

b) *Unaccompanied underage immigrants*

A second stressor for the Barcelona City Council is the presence of unaccompanied underage migrants, basically males of Moroccan origin. It deals directly with children’s human rights (Rinaldi, 2019). This is not new, since Barcelona has been facing with this for several years, but it has become a structural stressor with multilevel governance implications, since underage children are not strictly speaking among the competences of the city, but of the autonomous government. The number reaching 18 years old, without regularizing their migration status, but losing protection, has duplicated these last few years (Aranda, 2018). There are also social and legal implications. The social arise because visibility creates social reluctance and even neighborhood concentrations claiming more security in some streets and districts; and legal ones, since here the city council is fully aware that they are dealing with children human rights protection. In drawing resilient strategies most policy makers are fully aware they lack instruments and realize that “our Western societies are not prepared to host these unaccompanied children” (SF).

These two ways of labelling the same issue is something that SF underlines:

I would like to stress that young immigrants have often been placed under the umbrella of immigration rather than infancy. This is a big bias because, at the end of the day, there is a large diversity of cases. We always speak of the young immigrant profile that has lived in Tangier’s streets, that takes drugs, has a relevant criminal history and that has been waiting for a long time. This young person is not representative, and this is the first idea that is difficult to undo. Some young people migrate as part of a family project, some come from either a rural or an urban background, or even with middle to upper socioeconomic statuses.

RS also highlights that during the pandemic period, Barcelona has been faced with the unaccompanied minors that wander through the streets. The municipality realized that a new center was needed to serve them and *Barcelona Actua* volunteered to promote it.<sup>7</sup> I may also mention the Detection Service, which depends on the City Council’s Department for Children, Social Rights, Global Justice, Feminisms, and LGBT. The city gives them accommodation, but first they need to identify them on the street.

c) *Immigrants in administrative irregularity in its whole diversity of profiles and survival economic activities*

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<sup>7</sup> The *Barcelona Actua Foundation* (<https://www.barcelonactiva.cat/>) is a non-profit organization that begun in 2011 as a response to the great economic crisis, with the will to mobilize civil society, as well as to create strong ties between people in situations of vulnerability that need support and people who can offer support.

Probably, the main stressor for resilience strategies is the presence of immigrants with administrative irregularity (Agatiello & LeVoy, 2016). This is the most flagrant byproduct of bordering policies that cities must face, especially those that have a large urban area, such as Barcelona. The city has recently implemented what policy officers and media call a “shock plan,” with more than half million euros for actions designated for migrants in a state of irregularity (El Periódico, 2020). We are speaking of first stage irregular migrants that will never reach a regular status; or a second stage irregulars, or migrants that were regular at some point of their migratory process but became irregulars. There is also a third way of becoming irregular, and this is the most frequent among Latin Americans who enjoy free visa access. They usually come as tourists and after 90 days of staying they attain irregular status. These three ways of becoming irregular are directly related to bordering processes: you enter clandestinely, you enter as tourist or through induced irregularity because you lost your work contract, or you do not meet the residence conditions. Most enter in “survival economic activities,” namely activities that are illegal or not welcome, like the everyday practices of migrant street peddlers—‘manteros or top manta’ movement (Meneses-Reyes & Caballero-Juárez, 2013; Graaf & Ha, 2015; Moffette, 2020), which has issued several resilient programs (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015b and 2017b) and a lot of press releases (for instance, Barcelona Notícies, 2019).

The situation of sudden irregularity is provoked by the Immigration Law, which turns them into people outside the system upon the end of their labor contract. These issues can only be solved through legal means. These people are stigmatized, and society often links irregularity with crime. For all the participants, these bordering processes directly affect their daily work, and it is here that “creativity” and “imagination” drives most of the resilient strategies.

Apart from the specific strategy of proactive registration of irregulars, some interviews also stand out on how to change the regulation criteria to include irregulars. For instance, the strategy seeking to provide work opportunities to irregular migrants through *Barcelona Activa*. AG insists on how this agency follows strategies to circumvent bordering barriers: “*Barcelona Activa* does not limit access to its programs to people with a residence permit and the employment plans of the city council that was established a couple of years ago, which is common in city councils in general. These programs allow them to decide what kind of profiles they hire.”

At the innovative level, there is a government measure to prevent irregularity. It was the first time that a European municipality decided to tackle irregular immigrants through the strategy of active local registration in the city’s records, granting them access to the municipal services and legal advice, and providing them with labor opportunities to “legalize” their situation, as a specific *Barcelona Activa* program does (RS). This program called *Proper* was created in 2013 targeting the growing demand for a new profile of severely social service users affected by the economic crisis with a situation of long-term unemployment who deserve more preventive care, especially migrants in irregular situation. The program provides them with labor opportunities, but it is not public, this it to both “prevent social adverse reactions” and to avoid creating expectations and frustrations within the same irregular migrant community. As the program offers very limited jobs, and most of them within the same public administration. The program expresses a political will to support a policy resilient de-bordering procedure (see the public report made by Sanz & Pardo, 2015). This follows other important government measures against sudden irregularity (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017a and press releases from Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017b). For this reason and given the large number of people in an irregular situation that is already present in many

municipal programs (for instance: OPAI, SOAPI, SASSEP, see references) it was decided to know which people were potentially regularizable through a work permit. This political legalization of migrants is notably innovative. Moreover, there is an explicit two-level administrative procedure in place. To benefit from this program is not direct but also a derivative from any of these programs. What is important of this specific program is that, as RS and DT theorize, it promotes a new category: the immigrant that can be “legalized” (*irregular regularizable*) because they fulfil the criteria of a one-year-long job offer. This is then an explicit resilient strategy seeking to set up a mechanism to regularize immigrants in irregular administrative status through public employment offers. *Barcelona Activa* has been [recognized as a good practice](#) by the International Labor Organization.

AG insists that “[...] there are other matters that we cannot indefinitely avoid, like access to social aid or the basic income, which by the way excludes irregular immigrants. So, the city council tries to cover them with social services centers because ‘the necessity will not fade away by looking away.’ Overall, I would say that everything is related to Immigration Laws and the nationality criterion.” MS also insists as an example of innovation under pressure circumstances when there are limited competences and legal barriers:

[The] legislation [...] establishes recruitment at origin as the main entry mechanism, although in practice this is not very effective, no matter what the catalogue of professions difficult to fulfil sets. What usually happens is that the mechanism of ‘social embeddedness’ (*arrelament social*), which in theory is an exceptional measure, becomes the most common one. This creates a lot of discrepancies for us because we find people who have arrived in Spain on an irregular basis, more so now that the entry requirements of many countries of origin have been eliminated. We have families who arrive with a tourist visa and after 90 days they stay here hoping to legalize their situation. Yet, many do not know that they will have to wait three years and we do everything possible to register them and we work so that they can access all the services, even if they cannot be regularized until after these three years.

There are also extreme situations of vulnerability and homeless irregular migrants. SF, for instance, insists that “As for administrative irregularity, throughout the pandemic, we have been working on the balance of services and the mechanisms offered to homeless people. We have noticed that possibly, it is one of the main factors of vulnerability. These people are in limbo right now.” The latest data from the city council confirms that, despite the pandemic, the volume of assisted migrants remains (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2021). Economic resources are also mentioned by MS, when stating that “Barcelona used to attend around 1,100 asylum petitions per year back then and now, these numbers have gone up to 10,000 per year. Meanwhile, the resources and staff remain the same. No matter how much political will and budget you have, sometimes, there are structural limitations that depend on things as simple as how many chairs fit in a room or how many available boxes are there to offer individual attention to people.”

#### d) Refugees

Since half of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, refugees have become a stressor for most European cities (Spencer, 2020). For Barcelona, they also occupy a top-rank position in its agenda. From the very beginning, Barcelona took an activist position, enhancing a government measure: “Barcelona, refugee city” (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015a), which was later reviewed as a clear investment for cohesion-making

and citizenship (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2019), as well as for setting the premises for a ‘refugee city’ network called Solidarity Cities. This initiative was also one of the most numerous street demonstrations in Europe,<sup>8</sup> showing its close alliance between the society and the city government. In this domain, Barcelona has taken a pro-active attitude creating innovative services and policies. In general, these policies seek to go beyond its usual competence limits (they do it because they want to do it, not because they are forced to do it), but also against some state bordering decisions that directly affect the city’s ontological security. For instance, XC states that

...recently, we have also stepped up into the issues of refugees from the Canary Islands. The city council asked the state for competences to support all these guys within the Barcelona Refugee City program. They are in a social services center like that of *Barcelona Actua* that I have mentioned earlier, but we want it to become an established *modus operandi* in the future. So far, around 80 youngsters have benefited from it because many do not want to stay here and rather want to continue their journey to France or other places.

Some of these policies/programs/initiatives are more essential, and some are more capacity-building oriented or empowering, like the language and training issues, which may not be at first glance the first need but is equally important to find a job and get out of this vulnerability, as RS highlights. Barcelona’s resilience therefore has an activist solidarity force together with clear de-bordering policies seeking to avoid extreme vulnerability. For instance, the law allows you to apply for asylum or international protection and during the waiting period, between two or three years and a half, you are more-or-less legal, but in a waiting limbo. RS insists that the central government has even accelerated their bordering policies and begun to deny asylum in three or four months and the number of people in extreme vulnerability has multiplied suddenly. Most of them end up on Barcelona’s streets.

In this context, MS insists that in the domain of refuge, Barcelona is the first city of the state and one of the first in the EU to have a municipal program attending refugees and asylum-seekers who have either overpassed the state subsidies and accompaniment services and are not autonomous yet, or those people who simply have been excluded by the state program. This is a project that Barcelona began in 2016 with 20 or 30 users and now MS informs “we already have 130.”<sup>9</sup>

MS, as main responsible of this innovative service, states that “what we want to prove is that municipalities must get involved in the assistance of refugees and it must be done at different levels. I believe that the future of refugee support depends on the decentralization of the system, which is also a way to foresee the expiration of state services, which would lead to a collapse of the system. This program has been replicated elsewhere in Catalonia and the state.” He is speaking about the innovative Nausica Programme, which frames Barcelona as a Refugee City.<sup>10</sup> This program is important since it rescues those people that are left outside the state’s support (according to RS more than 130 refugees benefit from it today). It has the purpose of supporting migrants that have not yet achieved a degree of autonomy or integration in Barcelona after the expiration of the state’s mechanism of accompaniment. And it provides

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<sup>8</sup> 160,000 people according to the local police, and 300,000 according to the organizers protested under the slogan “Enough excuses. Welcome now!” (see Vicens, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> This is confirmed in press releases. Ajuntament de Barcelona (2017c).

<sup>10</sup> See the first evaluation in Ajuntament de Barcelona (2018b).

them with housing and employment search assistance. Within their main missions, we can collect building the autonomy and socio-occupational integration of refugees, providing tailored assistance, coordinating the provision of services and interventions across actors and incorporating refugees within the already existing Immigrant Care and Reception Directorate (Direcció d'Atenció i Acol·lida d'Immigrants). XC also highlights that apart from the Nausica program, there is the option of activating a temporary guesthouse service for cases of extreme vulnerability, which still does not fix the problem but, at least, it absorbs the shock for those people who were forced to leave their countries without anything because of threats. In general, then, the Barcelona city council is fully aware of the different pressures it must face to attend the different refugee profiles (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017d).

### 3.4 Alliances-building and institutions-building as a byproduct

Let me now also concentrate my content analysis on the importance of alliances-building and the creation of new institutions as a byproduct of these alliances for performing resilient de-bordering strategies. Fieldwork invites us to work the hypothesis that resilience drives most cities to create alliances. Interviews also show us how important it is to design shared commitments on resilience strategies with other administrations. Different levels of governance face the same challenge of tracing a de-bordering process and have full awareness that most of the stressors they must face come from state bordering processes. For instance, MS highlights that:

...we still struggle because there are situations that do not depend on cities, but intergovernmental agreements, as the obtention of visas. This is the case of Central America, for example, which generally does require a visa to enter Spain. They enter the country as tourists and later they decide to overstay as irregular immigrants. Then, you also have situations related to countries of origin or armed conflicts, as we saw in 2015 and 2016 with Syria and its surroundings.

AG also points towards these same issues adding some new dimensions justifying the need of drawing a de-bordering strategy against the effects of the state's bordering decisions.

The mayor always claims that even if immigration and asylum do not fall under our duties, we do have an incumbency with our neighbors and that is why we get involved with these issues and feel that we must grant access to all services and procedures to all people, even to those who do not depend on the local administration; we provide counselling and accompanying to all users.

Most of these alliances show us both how cooperation is translated in practice into coordination (or "common arrangement"). From a multilevel governance point of view, these alliances happen both at a vertical level, with upper governments, in this case with Catalonia's government (Generalitat de Catalunya), but also with international organizations; and at horizontal levels, with other local administrations, most of them within the same urban area.

#### a) *Vertical Alliances*

*With the Catalan Government.* There is an explicit cooperation with the Catalan government on some strategies that otherwise could not be implemented. The shared resilient background is the fact that some competencies are divided, especially those that trace a vital trajectory, as is the case with unaccompanied



minor immigrants. For instance, Barcelona city and the *Generalitat* work together within a shared policy arrangement for managing young undocumented migrants. New services are created together, in coordination. SF insists on this point: “We work closely with DGAIA (*Direcció General d’Atenció a la Infància i l’Adolescència*, Directorate General of Child and Adolescent Care) alternating the logical side of building and lobbying, collaboration and denouncing. In Barcelona, we have the Youth on Streets Detection Service.” This service is not specific to migrants, but to all children and teenagers at high risk of social marginalization with the aim of contributing to their personal development. It also exercises the protection and guardianship of helpless children and adolescents. In concrete terms, the local administration can only work with young people that have reached 18 years old, and the *Generalitat*, with underage youngsters, respectively. The social exclusion and situation of vulnerability continues from one age period to another.

*International cities alliances* that have taken shape under the form of a network is also a common resilient trend. For instance, MS informs that the European Commission opened an urban agenda that gave the possibility to different cities to get in touch with one another and with the Commission itself, like the Commissioner for Regional Policy. It gathered Barcelona, Athens, and Amsterdam among the strongest ones. However, this was in the former mandate. Now, the present government has gone a bit backwards. He also insists that “we see that abroad, the different administrations (the state and municipalities) work hand in hand and resources and competencies are shared. This does not exist here. Here, immigration and asylum are part of the state’s core competencies, which generates a lack of awareness of the immigrants’ needs.” You can also count on C-MISE (City Initiative on Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe), a space for cities that work with irregular immigrants.<sup>11</sup> Two well-known networks follow it, such as [Integrating Cities](#) and [Cities of Migration](#). There are also [Eurocities](#) and [Solidarity Cities](#).

#### b) *Horizontal Alliances*

*National cities networks:* The alliances with other Catalan and Spanish cities are also key for Barcelona’s resilient strategy. Barcelona belongs to a Spanish city network of refuge cities denouncing Spain’s noncompliance with refugee quotas. The network of cities includes Barcelona, Madrid, A Coruña, València, Zaragoza, and as many as 25 municipalities which, given the inaction from the state regarding refuge, have joined forces to help address the refugee crisis.

Interviews show us how important the coordination of spaces is among neighboring cities, most of them belonging to the same urban areas. MS for instance argues that it makes no sense to do anything until we work with the same register policies across municipalities. There are municipalities that refuse to register irregular immigrants. So, this lack of alliance between neighboring cities may be an added stressor if a cooperative relationship does not exist. AG states this because Barcelona attracts the immigrant populations that are not welcomed in the metropolitan area. There are also *alliances with CSO actors* that cluster most interviews. One sentence pronounced by AG can be taken as a Barcelona’s resilient motto: “Barcelona is nothing without its associative fabric.” Historically, the municipality has collaborated with the CSO sector and most of the bordering challenges the city encounters are engaged with them. MS insists that social entities provide and make up for those services that the public administration cannot fulfil. They have a lot more information and sometimes, they even coordinate the programs because they

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<sup>11</sup> C-MISE is a knowledge-exchange program supporting European cities in sharing knowledge on city practices and policies responding to the presence of irregular migrant, coordinated by COMPASS (Oxford University) and comprising as core cities Athens, Barcelona, Frankfurt, Ghent, Gothenburg, Lisbon, Oslo, Stockholm, and Utrecht (Chair).

have access to all administrative levels. Sometimes, CSOs even mediate between different governments and this mediation strategy is often used as a resilient strategy.

One illustrative example of institutional collaboration is the welcoming service SAIER, born thanks to the Municipal Welfare Council (Consell Municipal de Benestar Social), in the 80s, and initially providing service to the needs of refugees escaping from Pinochet's regime, among others. Together with the program "Barcelona Refuge City," it has received the recognition of OECD as innovative strategies. The SAIER is a network of services provided by five leading social organizations: two leading trade unions services for migrants and refugees (CITE and AMIC), Red Cross and the Barcelona bar association, and a specific linguistic service provided by Consortium for language normalization (*Consorti Per a la Normalització Lingüística*).

What we notice as a mainstream trend clustering all the interviews, is that in building resilient strategies, Barcelona city does not feel alone, but mobilizes its CSOs network to perform its airbag function in front of these stressors. For instance, the cooperation with the Red Cross for implementing their refugee's strategies is key since the Red Cross also plays the double function of bridging city authorities with state authorities. [ACCEM](#) is an NGO working to improve the refugee's quality of life providing legal advice and following up asylum processes, together with management of housing centers for unaccompanied children and migrants. Probably, the intervention of XC summarizes this collaborative practice with multiple actors to perform resilient strategies: "We work very collaboratively with the entities and CSOs because it would be impossible without them. And among them, there are the trade unions, like CITE (CCOO) and AMIC-UGT and *Col·legi d'Advocats* (lawyers bar association) for any pleas, etc. When any theme that falls outside the support functions is identified, like gender violence, we activate the internal services of the city council like the Office for No Discrimination (Grigolo, 2010) or [Iridia](#) (Center for the Defense of Human Rights), in cases of institutional violence. And from these, we are able to provide more tailored services." Mentorship is also referred by SF. There are experiences of mentorship through the social fabric and Catalonia is a pioneer in all this. The way you communicate with society, how you work on mentorship or with host families.

#### **4. Concluding remarks evaluating this first exploration and master lines for further research**

There is already a huge literature on a typology of cities (welcome cities, gateway cities, intercultural cities, refugee cities, etc. (Caponio *et al.*, 2018). In this case the category of "border city" becomes a heuristic perspective within the symbolic meaning of border. It is this concrete approach I have followed. The main purpose of this chapter has been twofold. First to theoretically link two heuristic analytical tools: ontological security and resilience, applied at the local level. Second, Barcelona fieldwork has explored the policy strategies that cities have adopted to cope with uncertainty and pressure situations basically due to state bordering policies. These strategies are interpreted as de-bordering strategies and resilience is its main driver.

Resilience is the notion that helps us categorize the effort of local authorities to provide to the migrants and to the social environment the routines in a system that have been broken/or maybe they have never had the opportunity to enjoy. Resilience in cities towards bordering stressors can be interpreted as driven by local ontological security.

The fieldwork has followed several interconnected premises: a) when uncertainty arises or routines are disrupted into a social system, we enter into the domain both of ontological insecurity and resilience; b) the EU/state (re)bordering processes may directly affect the ontological security of the cities; c) ontological security applied at the city level is mainly understood in policy terms as cohesion-making (societal level) and “the right to have rights” at the individual level; d) “de-bordering” strategies, or the policies seeking to surpass the state’s bordering barriers, may be focused under the approach of resilience strategies; and e) we enter into the current debate on ontological security arguing for a multi-scalar approach, namely that apart from state and individual levels, the conjunction and tensions that may arise between different coexisting understandings of ontological security, the state, and the local levels is unexplored. This multi-scalar approach to ontological security is a theoretical byproduct contribution of this chapter that may require further theoretical advancement.

Resilient ontological security applied at the local level is a promising focus of analysis that may be applied at other cities and even comparatively. The purpose is to identify innovative and transformative strategies that cities follow to face stressors coming from bordering processes. This theoretical focus may help the same resilient cities ensure their own understanding of ontological security (cohesion and the “right to have rights” of migrants), in circumstances of uncertainties and risks, under shocks and stresses created by the same state bordering processes.

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